BY

EDWARD ROBINS

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Twelve Great Actresses

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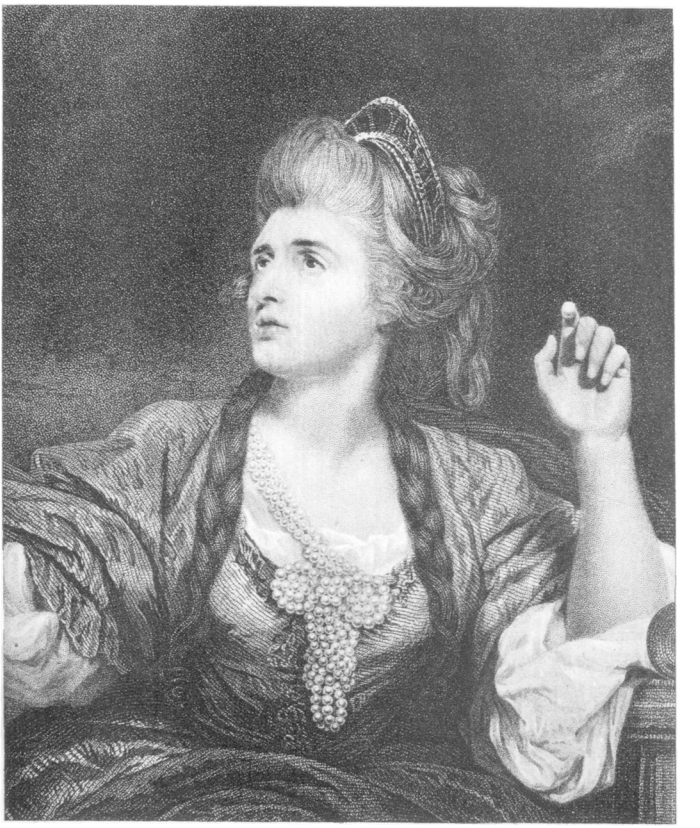
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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, NEW YORK & LONDON

TWELVE GREAT ACTRESSES





Sarah Siddons as the "Tragic Muse."

From a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

TWELVE GREAT ACTRESSES

BY

EDWARD ROBINS

AUTHOR OF "ECHOES OF THE PLAYHOUSE"
"BENJAMIN FRANKLIN," ETC.

"— Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed? Do you hear, let them be well used; for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time."

Hamlet

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
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1900

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EDWARD ROBINS

The Knickerbocker Press, New York



PREFACE

IN the days of Shakespeare, and for a number of years thereafter, the feminine characters of his plays were acted by good-looking youths. Rosalind, Portia, Ophelia, and their sisters, grave or gay, often rejoiced, no doubt, in gruff voices and incipient beards. Often, too, must dramatic illusions have been destroyed. Yet Shakespeare and his friends looked on contentedly at the anomaly. An actress had no place in the hearts of English audiences. How strange that seems when we think of the noble position which she now holds upon the English or American stage. In Painting, in Sculpture, in Poetry, or in the Sciences man still leads, but in the Drama, as in Opera, woman ranks as his equal. It is hard to imagine how the stage flourished without her presence. Surely the world has been made the richer by the stern tragedy of

a Siddons, the jocund humour of a Dora Jordan, or the deep power of a Rachel. Boy-actors, forsooth! Shakespeare would not have tolerated them could he have pictured the Rosalind of Mrs. Woffington, or the Juliet of Adelaide Neilson, or the Queen Katherine of Charlotte Cushman.

Woman is now so potent a factor in the theatre that she commands as much deference from the modern histrionic chronicler as does her rival, man. There is no need, therefore, to explain why the writing of the TWELVE GREAT ACTORS has been followed by studies of TWELVE GREAT ACTRESSES. The author only hopes that the public will find, in reading about these heroines, half—or even a quarter—of the pleasure he has himself derived from the preparation of the present volume.

PHILADELPHIA,
September 10, 1900.

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‘ Is she not more than painting can express,
Or youthful poets fancy when they love ? ’’

—*Nicholas Rowe.*



ANNE BRACEGIRDLE

Two Rascals

ON a night in December, 1692, when their most Protestant of Majesties, William of Orange and Mary, sat firmly on the English throne, to the disgust of all good Jacobites, there was a sudden uproar in the usually quiet Princes Street, of London. A little before ten o'clock, six British soldiers, otherwise six hired law-breakers, then off duty from their barracks, had been seen in this thoroughfare, lurking near an unpretentious house whence issued, at intervals, the sound of laughter, and the appetising gurgle made by the pouring of wine into glass or loving-cup. Within hailing distance of the soldiers stood a lumbering carriage, attached to restless, pawing horses. It contained two of the worst rascals the fair land of Britain ever nurtured, to wit: Captain Richard Hill, swaggerer and genteel desperado, and Charles, Lord Mohun, a peer of

An Ardent Lover

England who had once been tried for murder, and, unfortunately, acquitted. They seemed gentlemanly enough, in all the glory of fine periwigs, swords, flowing coats, silk stockings, and big shoe-buckles, but evil intent and the flush of drink shone on their faces.

They were waiting there, in fact, to enact a little drama of forcible elopement, of which Anne Bracegirdle, one of the loveliest and best admired actresses of her time, was expected to be the unwilling heroine. The Captain, discovering that he was madly in love with the charmer, and feeling sure that he could never win her by fair means, had secured the virtuous aid of his friend, the Lord Mohun, that he might the easier carry her off, after a fashion more mediæval than proper. He had learned that the lady was to sup this very evening, in company with her mother and brother, at the home of a Mr. Page, on Princes Street, and he determined that so good an opportunity was not to be wasted.

About the time that a clock in Drury Lane struck the hour of ten, the Bracegirdle, looking very pretty in the light that came from the hallway, appeared on the steps of Mr. Page's house. Her mother and brother were with her; the host was escorting her



ANNE BRACEGIRDLE.

FROM AN OLD PRINT.

Mistress "Bracy"

politely to the door, and the quartette had that comfortable, merry feeling which a good supper should produce.

Suddenly there is a scream from the actress. The soldiers attempt to seize her as she gains the street; there is a scuffle as Captain Hill and Mohun arrive on the scene; and fierce resistance from the brother and Mr. Page, who hasten to the rescue. The noise of the tumult stirs the neighbourhood; windows are opened, men rush from houses; an excited crowd gathers—and, in short, the scheme ends in dismal failure. Then, wonderful to relate, the two would-be abductors turn cavaliers, and actually accompany the lady to her home in Howard Street, while she, not over-indignant at being the cause of so much masculine ardour, makes no strenuous objection. Anne Bracegirdle is in the habit of seeing half the gallants in town at her pretty feet, and although she is quick to refuse their suits, as she gives one and all a sweet, sisterly smile that only increases their hopeless passion, she is too much of a woman to be very angry at Captain Hill. And how London will talk, too, of this escapade, as it will declare that she is a perfect Diana of purity and beauty! The thought is alluring.

So home she patters, quite unsuspecting

Handsome Mountfort

of the tragedy which is to follow. Hill and Mohun walk with her, after the manner of devoted henchmen, and Howard Street is soon reached. Then the Captain suddenly recollects that handsome Will Mountfort, the actor who makes such delightful stage-love to the Bracegirdle, lives in a house near by. The remembrance does not please him. "Zounds!" Is it not common report that this Mountfort has tried to make real love to the actress? So Hill bursts forth into loud threats against the player, as he draws his sword, dares his enemy to engage in combat, and sends to a tavern for a flagon of canary. The Bracegirdle is now frightened; vanity is replaced by prudence, as she writes word to Mrs. Mountfort to warn her husband to keep away.

But Will Mountfort is the man to accept any challenge that is offered. He has the ill-fortune to come home just as the message is received from Mistress Bracegirdle; whereupon he dashes around to where stands Hill (who is flourishing his rapier and drinking copious draughts of wine), embraces my Lord Mohun, according to the polite custom of the day, and pays his compliments, in a less flattering way, to the rascally Captain. In plain, set terms, Mountfort expresses his opinion of Hill; that gentleman retaliates;

in another moment the latter has run his sword through the actor's body. No use for the Bracegirdle to wring her white hands. Mountfort is carried home to die; Captain Hill gets out of England as quickly as possible, and Mohun, who is tried for murder by the House of Lords, and acquitted, is preserved for yet another scene of slaughter —the fatal duel between himself and the Duke of Hamilton.

What a roistering, drinking, unprincipled, yet clever and picturesque world was this London of which Anne Bracegirdle became one of the most brilliant inhabitants ! No wonder that people stared at her in amazement because she had the reputation, rightly or wrongly, for such a stock of private virtue. Those were the days when actresses were never expected to have inflexible morals, and when Purity was not at her best in a theatre, either before or behind the curtain. From the beginning of the reign of Charles II. until the dawn of the eighteenth century, or afterwards, the dramatic atmosphere, reflecting the atmosphere of real life among the men and women of quality, was too often surcharged with the evil currents of indecency and elegant sensuality. There was a great deal of glitter in the works of the playwrights of that time, but little of health, or

Theatrical Fashions

honesty, or naturalness. Shakespeare was looked upon as a very intelligent barbarian, whose plays could only be made acceptable to refined tastes by adaptations; artifice took the place of nature; stilted language succeeded good, vigorous English. The new tragedies were, for the most part, declamatory pieces, dealing, in wearisome fashion and in turgid rhymes, with pompous characters of the classic kind. The comedies had rakes for their heroes, and placed a premium on vice, while the dialogue was so vile, on occasion, that ladies masked their faces when they wanted to listen to it.

It is not strange, therefore, that there was little of decorum, as we know that quality now, among the audiences of a playhouse. The only cause for wonder is that the players were able to act, or that their efforts received attention. The gallery, in which were footmen more haughty than their masters, often contributed its quota of disorder; in the boxes were richly dressed belles, who laughed and talked, and ogled their masculine attendants; orange-girls were plying their trade here and there, as they also carried on their flirtations; occupants of the pits amused themselves, when in mocking mood, by criticising audibly the ladies in the boxes; exquisitely costumed, heavily scented

Unruly Audiences

beaux were walking about crying, "Dem me, this is a —— play!" or bustling back to sit on the stage while the performance was in progress. When the latter pastime proved a bore the gallants would retire to the dressing-rooms of the actresses, to watch them at their toilets, or, perchance, they would organise a riot, insult an actor, or say rude things to the orange-girls, and then go off to drink out the rest of the evening at the coffee-houses, where plays were discussed, and reputations made and unmade.

Once a band of these fine gentlemen, filled with wine and sudden virtue, entered the theatre with loud cries against King Charles's favourite, the Duchess of Portsmouth, who was sitting in a conspicuous seat, watching the play. Each of these guardians of public morality carried a drawn sword in one hand and a lighted torch in the other. They marched into the pit, using their swords indiscriminately on the bodies of all the men they encountered, and then threw the torches on the stage, in the faces of the dismayed actors. At this the audience fled in pardonable panic, but the theatre, as if by a miracle, escaped destruction from fire. It does not appear that the rioters succeeded in reforming the frail Duchess. All they did was to frighten a lot of people, anger King Charles,

Collier's Protest

and cause him to close the house for a time, to the intense inconvenience of the poor players.

On another occasion, two young blades started to fight in the pit, and finally jumped up on the stage, where they waged their contest, to the great edification of the audience, until one of them received a severe wound from the sword of his adversary.

Such was the laxity of theatrical life that the Reverend Jeremy Collier was inspired to write a *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, wherein he pilloried many a crying evil. "The present English stage," he said, "is superlatively scandalous. It exceeds the liberties of all times and countries." He pointed out, among other things, that the heroes of comedies were, too often, profligates of the most shameless kind, and he contended that the authors of plays should endeavour, by their writings, "to recommend virtue and discountenance vice, to show the uncertainty of human greatness, the sudden turns of fate, and the unhappy conclusions of violence and injustice." He had a wide subject, of which he made the most, and a *Short View* became the literary sensation of the hour. Other clergymen, in later times, have tried to make equal sensations by declaiming

Old Conditions

in words of fire against the stage, but they have had less to rage about, and so have failed.

Yet this much abused, and often pernicious theatre, which flourished during the last forty years of the seventeenth century, was the home of some of the best players who ever trod the boards. Stilted might be the tragedy, and unclean the comedy, but there were tragedians who could put life into impossible figures, and comedians who could, by their brilliancy, give value to the tawdry creations of a Congreve or a Crowne. None twinkled more brightly in this firmament of stars than did Mistress Anne Bracegirdle, whose career, little as we know of its details, belongs to the most cherished traditions of the English drama. When we read of her through the pages of old Colley Cibber, who paints the portraits of his histrionic contemporaries with the skill and colour of a Vandyke, we half wish that we had lived in those unregenerate days, that we might have peeped in at the play, walked in the Mall, talked politics at the coffee-houses, or stolen a sight of royalty as it rode by in its jolty, gilded chariot, and wondered how long the English people would refrain from beheading it, *à la* obstinate Charles I.

Anne Bracegirdle was born about 1663,

The Bettertons

and her father is said to have been a coach-maker of Northampton. Her early years are shrouded in mystery, but there is a well-grounded tradition to the effect that she was placed, as a very small child, under the care of the great Thomas Betterton and his devoted wife. Home and the players do not always seem to be synonymous terms, yet where could a girl have found more loving care than within the house of this happy pair, whose love for each other stood out in peaceful contrast to the indifference, or the infidelities, of not a few married couples around them? The corruptions of the age never smirched this actor and actress; they were lovers long after silver had touched their locks, and their hearts only grew the younger as the years sped onward.

"I only know," the ubiquitous Pepys had said of him, "that Mr. Betterton is the best actor in the world." Betterton was surely the greatest actor of his time, and one of the few great ones of all time. In all parts —and he played through a remarkable range —he was effective; in many he reached grandeur, and in several he must have been sublime. His most admired character was that of Hamlet, which he played, as it were, by divine right of inheritance, for he had been instructed in the rôle by Davenant,

An Ideal Hamlet

who had himself seen Taylor, the supposed *protégé* of Shakespeare, as the Dane. The audiences loved to watch Betterton in the scenes of Hamlet's first meeting with the Ghost. The usually ruddy face of the actor would turn as white as his neckcloth, while the terror which he *looked* was actually *felt* by the audience. So great was this glance of horror that when Barton Booth first acted the Ghost to the Hamlet of Betterton, he became so confused that he forgot his lines.

But with all the praise that was lavished upon him—not to mention the then princely wages of £5 a week which he received—Betterton was kind-hearted and unassuming. He, the son of a cook to King Charles I., was a truer gentleman than many an Englishman who boasted sixteen quarterings on his shield and a family tree that first sprouted in the Garden of Eden. When Colley Cibber, then a frightened novice, spoiled one of the great man's scenes by his own nervousness, Betterton asked, on coming off the stage, who the youngster was, and what salary he was given. When it was explained that he was "Master Colley," a volunteer who had no salary, the actor said: "Then put him down ten shillings a week, and forfeit him five of them!" It was Betterton,

Mistress Barry

too, who made the oft-quoted remark to the prelate who complained that his own preaching did not excite as much sympathy as the performances of the player. "You, in the pulpit," said Betterton, "only tell a story; I, on the stage, show facts."

It was with Betterton, when she was scarcely sixteen years old (not six years old, as one biographer precociously has her), that Mistress Anne made her first recorded appearance. The play was Otway's tragedy of *The Orphan*, and in it she essayed, very charmingly, the part of a page. 'T was the first of those "breeches" characters in which she was afterwards to become so fascinating that the audiences would as soon see her in the guise of a man as in her true feminine costumes. The Monimia of that performance was none other than the superb Mistress Barry, she of the majestic mien and full, clear voice, who did the tragedy queens in a truly august manner, and played Elizabeth, the last of the Tudors, so well that many an Englishman could not disassociate the idea of the real virgin princess from the impressive personality of the actress. It was the Barry, be it remembered, who had that historic tussle with a Mistress Boutelle, which set all the tongues of London wagging like bell-clappers. The two women had been

Mrs. Barry as "Constance."

From a design by Roberts.



Rival Queens

fighting over a matter so important as the possession of a veil; the master of the wardrobe decided that the Boutelle had a prior right to the article; whereat Mistress Barry's fine eyes flashed forth things unutterable. When the ladies were acting, the same day, in *The Rival Queens*, Mrs. Barry, the Roxana, waited her chance until she got Mrs. Boutelle, the Statira, in the Gardens of Semiramis. As she came to the lines: "Die, sorceress, die, and all my wrongs die with thee!" Roxana plunged her knife into the bosom of her enemy, as she was expected to do, and inflicted, as she was *not* expected to do, a trifling wound. The Boutelle shrieked out in fright, but when she insinuated that there had been more of reality than acting in Roxana's hate, the Barry merely shrugged her lovely shoulders. She had simply been carried away, she said, by the excitement of the scene.

With the inspiration of Betterton, and the kindly encouragement of the laxly-moralled Barry, Anne slowly made her way to the front of the stage, from pages to more conspicuous parts, until we hear of her at Drury Lane Theatre, playing Lucia in *The Squire of Alsatia*, and Maria in *Edward III.* Soon she was a reigning toast at private dinners and in taverns; all the self-constituted critics

A London Toast

in London began to praise the genteel elegance of her comedy, and the air of languorous innocence which she imparted to sentimental characters. Beaux swore, "Oddsfish!" that she was a charmer, a *carissima*, a dainty, ravishing bit of humanity; even the jealous belles admitted that though the "young thing" was not really handsome, she had a pretty way, and a "modish" style of dressing and of twirling her fan. What a part, by the way, used the fan to play on the stage! It was a dangerous weapon, forsooth, in the hands of a fair actress who knew how to employ it as an adjunct to the glances fired, like fatal shot, from the battery of her eyes.

Now it happened that the jealous belles were right when they said that the Bracegirdle was not actually handsome. She belonged to the order of woman whose beauty comes more from her expression and a hundred indefinable traits than from any regularity of feature. Her hair was of a rich dark brown, her eyes black and sparkling, and her complexion "fresh and blushy." When she opened her mouth the spectators saw a pearly set of teeth — no one could intimate in those undental days that she was false — and, if she smiled, they straightway forgot the teeth, and vowed that she was the most

Praise from Cibber

blithesome and lighth-earted thing in the world. "Ecod! What a fine form!" some gallant would cry. "Wait till you 've seen her in a man's clothes," his friend would say.

"Never any woman," writes Cibber, in his *Apology*, "was in such general favour of her spectators, which, to the last scene of her dramatic life, she maintained by not being unguarded in her private character. This discretion contributed not a little to make her the *Cara*, the Darling of the Theatre: for it will be no extravagant thing to say, scarce an audience saw her that were less than half of them lovers, without a suspected favourite among them. And though she might be said to have been the Universal Passion, and under the highest temptations, her constancy in resisting them served but to increase the number of her admirers."

The more icy, indeed, became Mistress "Bracy," the more applause she received, as if the gallants, by the very warmth of their praise, expected to thaw out her cold, indifferent heart. How the town did gossip, to be sure, when Lord Burlington got such a snubbing from her, quite to his own amazement. He sent her a present of some fine old china, accompanied by a note more or less tender of expression, in care of one of his footmen. The actress received the

Sighing Lords

servant, looked at the china, and opened the letter. "Ah, there must be some mistake," she said, very demurely, after reading what Lord Burlington had written; "the letter is for me, 't is true, but the china is meant for your mistress, the Countess, to whom you should carry it." So home goes the footman, to place the china at the feet of Lady Burlington. "Lord! the Countess was so full of gratitude when her husband came home to dinner."

Another nobleman who tried to soften the adamantine heart of the Bracegirdle was my Lord Lovelace, one of the best-dressed men in London. Heaven alone knows what his morals may, or may not, have been; but of the fit of his wig, the cut of his clothes, or the temper of his sword, there could be no possible shadow of doubt. Every day, for a season or two, his lordship would send a servant to ask Mistress Anne "how she did"; and every day would the actress return word that "she was indifferent well, and humbly thanked Lord Lovelace." The more impassioned grew the nobleman, the more polite and frigid waxed the fascinating charmer.

Macaulay has ungallantly stigmatised her as a cold, vain coquette who well understood how the influence of her charms increased

Cold Juno

by the fame of a severity which cost her nothing. Possibly he stumbled on the truth, —for Macaulay was one of those imaginative historians who occasionally wandered into accidental accuracy. Yet why not give the lady the benefit of the doubt, and grant that her virtue, if she truly had it, may have been something more than the mask of self-interest, or the impassiveness of a statue made of snow ?

There were many of her own contemporaries who were willing to take Mistress Bracegirdle's purity at her valuation. Among these may be mentioned Lords Devonshire, Dorset, Halifax, and other peers, who met on one festive occasion and opened a bottle, or rather a dozen bottles, in honour of her unblemished character. Lord Halifax, made generous by the flow of spirits, remarked that they might do something more than eulogise so much goodness, and promptly placed upon the table a couple of hundred guineas. His companions, not to be outdone, added to the pile, and the sum of £800 was sent to the lady, as a token of admiration. Even in those lusty days, so it would appear, there was a premium on continence.

There was one admirer, however, upon whom Bracegirdle was supposed to look

The Poet Congreve

with favourable eye. This was the plump and handsome William Congreve, poet, playwright, gentleman, official under Government, frequenter of taverns and theatres, and one of the most popular men of his day. Clever, witty, artificial, he mirrored but the aspect of his time; and we are not surprised as we turn the musty pages of his long-forgotten comedies, to see how brilliant they were, and how unscrupulous. Vicious and humorous, lewd and gay, these plays are at once the shame and the glory of the age in which he dwelt so comfortably. When Thackeray read two or three of them he was shocked at their ribaldry, and at the easy, genteel immorality of the heroes, who were always overcoming virtue, and looking to sympathetic audiences for a pleased wink or an encouraging nod.

"Fathers, husbands, usurers, are the foes these champions contend with. They are merciless in old age, invariably, and an old man plays the part in the dramas which the wicked enchanter, or the great blundering giant performs in the chivalry tales, who threatens, and grumbles, and resists—a huge, stupid obstacle always overcome by the knight. It is an old man with a money-box: Sir Belmour, his son or nephew, spends his money and laughs at him. It is an old man with a young wife whom he

Polished Vice

locks up: Sir Mirabel robs him of his wife, trips up his gouty old heels, and leaves the old hunks. The old fool, what business has he to hoard his money, or to lock up blushing eighteen? Money is for youth, love is for youth; away with the old people."

Love, idle, reckless love—the love of an hour, not of a lifetime—the love of a selfish swain for a frail Chloe or Phyllis—that was the refrain in Congreve's comedies. All that he wrote was polished, graceful, elegant: Englishmen and Englishwomen thought him irresistible when he penned such amorously elegiac lines as:

"See! see, she wakes—Sabina wakes!
And now the sun begins to rise.
Less glorious is the morn, that breaks
From his bright beams, than her fair eyes.
With light united, day they give;
But different fates ere night fulfil:
How many by his warmth will live!
How many will her coldness kill."

This was the poet who worshipped at the shrine of the Bracegirdle, for a time at least, and wrote for her the parts of Araminta in *The Old Bachelor*, Cynthia in *The Double Dealer*, Angelica, the tender heiress, in *Love for Love*, the light-hearted Mistress-Mil-

Mistress Millamant

lamant in *The Way of the World*, and Almeria in the tragedy of *The Mourning Bride*.

As we think of Mistress Anne in these characters the unhealthy cynicism of Congreve fades away. We only picture the actress who can give an air of innocence to old-time comedy, or put a naturalness wholly her own into bombastic tragedy. To read over *The Way of the World* is to conjure up her delightful airiness, and her petulance as she tells her slavish Mirabel that if she marries him she is to be given every liberty under the sun:

"to wear what I please, and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation on me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance; or to be intimate with fools, because they may be your relations. To come to dinner when I please, and dine in my dressing-room when I 'm out of humour, without giving a reason. To have my closet inviolate, and to be sole empress of my tea-table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly, wherever I am, you shall first knock at the door before you come in."

When Bracegirdle played Mistress Millamant, Colley Cibber would watch her in enthusiastic amazement, as he declared that

The Mourning Bride

all the faults and foibles of this finest of fine ladies were melted down, by the power of the actress, into so many attractions. Madame Anne had, indeed, that real comic genius which can give to stage eccentricity a gloss which it could never possess in real life. We laugh at Audreys and shrewish Katherines and Sir Toby Belches, when they are on the stage, without thinking that they might prove very exasperating if they lived with us. In other words, the true comedian is an idealist.

Far different from Millamant was the Almeria of *The Mourning Bride*, wherein the sweetness and ingenuousness of Bracegirdle had full scope. The play is dead now, save for two lines which many of us quote without knowing whence they come, but it once breathed of life, and thrilled the audiences, as the curtain rose on the disconsolate Almeria, while she listened to the dying sound of music, and lamented her woes in classic language:

"Music has charms to soothe a savage breast,
To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak;
I've read that things inanimate have moved
And, as with living souls, have been informed,
By magic numbers and persuasive sounds.
What then am I? Am I more senseless grown
Than trees or flint? O force of constant woe!
'T is not in harmony to calm my griefs."

Love by Proxy

In all the parts that Congreve wrote for Bracegirdle he seemed, as the wits observed, to be always pleading his own love for the actress. It was rumoured that the lady was by no means unkind to him, and that she had secretly married this fashionable bachelor. Of the latter piece of gossip there is no proof. All we know is that the two were constantly together—how "Bracy" did play the poet off, to be sure, against the impetuous Lord Lovelace — and that Congreve remained very faithful to his *Tendre* until he fell under the aristocratic spell of Henrietta, the young Duchess of Marlborough.

When a fierce hurricane sweeps over England, and dashes madly across London, Congreve is delighted at the providential escape of the fair Thespian. "Our neighbour in Howard Street," he writes to a friend, "'scaped well, though frightened, only the ridge of her house being stripped; and a stack of chimneys in the next house fell luckily into the street." At another time, after the performance at Dorset Garden of his masque, *The Judgment of Paris*, set to music by John Eccles, Congreve calls the Bracegirdle's personation of Venus "a miracle."

"The number of performers, besides the

A New Flame

verse singers, was eighty-five," he writes. "The front of the stage was all built into a concave with deal boards; all which was faced with tin, to increase and throw forward the sound. It was all hung with sconces of wax-candles, besides the common branches of lights usual in the playhouse. The boxes and pit were all thrown into one, so that all sat in common; and the whole was crammed with beauties and beaux; not one scrub being admitted."

But when Congreve died, long after Bracegirdle had retired from the stage, it was apparent, on the opening of his will, that the influence of the actress had gone the way of her youth and good looks. 'T was the old story of new faces and new desires. To Bracegirdle was bequeathed £200; the rest of his respectable fortune went to Her Grace of Marlborough.

The latter favourite, who had no pressing need for the money, frittered it away in idiotic mementos of the dead poet. She purchased a diamond necklace which made the dainty mouths of her fair friends water, for it cost £7000, and—this did not make their mouths water—she had constructed a life-size figure of Congreve. The image sat at her table in gruesome state, in the seat which the original used to occupy so gracefully, nodded its head, by a mechanical

Ducal Sorrow

contrivance, when she spoke to it, and had its feet wrapped in cloths, in memoriam of the gout which so often made life miserable for the deceased. Heaven rest the feverish souls of these old celebrities! When we think of the merry lives they led, and of the wine they drank, we ask ourselves why it was that they did not all die of the gout at the early age of twenty-five.

It was the Duchess of Marlborough who placed a tablet in Westminster Abbey, near the grave of Congreve, on which she set forth the happiness and honour she had enjoyed "in the sincere friendship of so worthy and honest a man, whose virtue, candour, and wit gained him the love and esteem of the present age," etc. Sarah, the old Duchess of Marlborough, that warrior bold, read the epitaph with a sarcastic smile lurking about her hard mouth. "I know not what pleasure Henrietta may have had in his company," she sneered, "but I am sure it was no 'honour'!" "How much better would it have been for Congreve," exclaimed Dr. Young, referring to the £10,000 bequeathed to the young Duchess, "to have given the money to poor Mrs. Bracegirdle!"

It must not be supposed that the histrionic fame of the Bracegirdle depended wholly upon the characters which the easy-natured,

Infinite Variety

rotund poet wrote for her. Far from it; she would have become the "Darling of the Theatre," had Congreve been a Virginia tobacco-planter, or dramatist-in-ordinary to the Grand Lama of Thibet. There were many parts, foreign to Congreve, in which she won success, either by her coy humour, her sweetness of demeanour, or certain dramatic qualities which enabled the lady to discard the shorter skirts of comedy for the long trains of tragedy heroines. Her repertoire included Belinda, in *The Provoked Wife* of Vanbrugh, the high-flown damsels in several tragedies by Nicholas Rowe, and such Shakespearian characters, in the mongrel distortions of the Bard's works then in fashion, as Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, Mistress Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Cordelia, Ophelia, Desdemona, and Portia. It is interesting to note that Bracegirdle is the first feminine Portia of whom there is record; probably any earlier Portia was played by one of those handsome youths who used to figure in women's parts to the great edification of the theatregoers. Several of these "boy-actors" flourished during the infancy of Bracegirdle herself, but as women began to take to the stage, after the Restoration, the masculine Rosalinds and Ophelias gradually disappeared, or turned

"Boy-Actors"

their attention to the characters of their own sex. One of the last of these bearded ladies was the picturesque Edward Kynaston, he who once kept King Charles II. waiting at the theatre such a long time for the curtain to rise on a certain tragedy. "Oddsfish!" cried His Majesty, "why must I wait?" Then came an humble explanation from behind the scenes. The heroine of the piece, Master Kynaston, was shaving. The King laughed at the paradox.

As Statira, in *The Rival Queens*, Mistress Bracegirdle won a great triumph, and proved so attractive of person that the extravagant love, "that almost frantick passion," of Alexander the Great seemed quite natural and justifiable. The play is only a name now, and many a theatregoer has never even heard of it, but it caused oceans of tears to flow during its century of usefulness. Audiences always felt unbounded sympathy for noble Statira, mild yet haughty, yielding yet brave, who received such an undeserved snub when Roxana was taken into Alexander's partial favour, but who was pacified, however, by that royal Mormon, and finally met death at the hands of her detested rival.

Yet the tragedy would be laughed at, or perhaps hissed off the boards, were a modern

manager rash enough to revive Lee's fustian and rhodomontade. Verily, Bracegirdle must have been a great artiste to have made thrilling and plausible the pathos of her final scene, where Statira actually enters into a delightful little argument with Roxana (who stands facing her with uplifted dagger), to show the latter what a bad case of mental indigestion a murder is sure to produce.

"ROXANA. — O ! Sorceress, to thy accursed charms
I owe the frenzy that distracts my soul :
To them I owe my Alexander's loss.
Too late thou trembles at my just revenge,
My wrongs cry out, and vengeance will have way.

"STATIRA. — Yet think, Roxana, ere you plunge in murder,
Think on the horrors that must ever haunt you !
Think on the furies, those avenging ministers
Of Heaven's high wrath ; how they will tear your soul ;
All day distract you with a thousand fears ;
And when, by night, thou vainly seek'st repose,
They 'll gather round, and interrupt your slumbers
With horrid dreams, and terrifying visions."

It is to be feared that the theatregoer of

Beyond Analysis

the year A.D. 1900 would welcome, rather than mourn over, the death of this long-winded heroine. Possibly a Bracegirdle might blind us to the absurdity of the tragedy. For Mistress Anne belonged to that elusive type of actresses whose work we are prone to enjoy without analysing it.

"In all the chief parts she acted," says Cibber, quaintly, "the desirable was so predominant, that no judge could be cold enough to consider from what other particular excellence she became delightful. To speak critically of an actress that was extremely good were as hazardous as to be positive in one's opinion of the best opera-singer."

Bracegirdle was particularly fortunate in having for her Alexander so ardent a stage-lover as dashing Will Mountfort, of whose death, as we have seen, she became the innocent cause. Impulsive, handsome of face, elegant of figure, melodious of voice, and plausible of manner, he was just the man to play either coxcombs or classic heroes, to lend sparkle to touch-and-go comedy, or to put romance into the rant of Dryden and Nathaniel Lee. Half the actresses were in love with him; all of them liked to have him pleading his mimic passion in their ears. The men admired him as the mirror of good

Handsome Mountfort

form; even the great comedian, Mr. Wilks, freely confessed, in after days, that he had borrowed inspirations for toilets and acting from the shining example of Mr. Mountfort. When, as Alexander, Mountfort threw himself at the feet of Bracegirdle, asking pardon for his infidelities, he seemed the most amiable penitent in the world. The women in the boxes darted languishing glances at him, and tapped their fans on the railings as they protested that Statira would be a demon if she withstood such a rapturous appeal. Methinks, indeed, that Mistress Mountfort, the wife of handsome Will, must have felt one pang of jealousy as she heard her lord cry, with love darting from his eyes:

"O my Statira! Thou relentless fair!
Turn thine eyes on me — I would talk to them:
What shall I say to work upon thy soul?
What words, what looks, can melt thee to forgiveness?"

In comedy, Mountfort seemed to give an extra wit of his own to the sparkle of the author; he had a particular talent for repeating *bon-mots* with an air of life, and he knew so well how to "wash off the guilt from vice," that his impersonation of a scalawag of a hero was often a menace to private morality.

Dangerous Heroes

When he played the sensual Rover, in a favourite play by the licentious Aphra Behn, Queen Mary declared he made profligacy so alluring that he was actually dangerous.

There is no evidence, or even suspicion, that Mountfort played the lover off the stage to Mistress Bracegirdle. He admired and respected her, but that was all. After his tragic death, Mistress Mountfort soon consoled herself by marrying a rough genius of an actor named Verbruggen, who used to say of her, with an old-fashioned oath: "Though I don't much value my wife, yet nobody shall affront her!"

It was this Mrs. Mountfort, or Mrs. Verbruggen, who made one of the best of stage coquettes, and inspired the graphic Cibber to give her a famous critique, for her archness in *Marriage à la Mode*.

"Melantha is as finished an impertinent as ever fluttered in a drawing-room, and seems to contain the most complete system of female foppery that could possibly be crowded into the tortured form of a fine lady. . . . The first ridiculous airs that break from her are upon a gallant, never seen before, who delivers her a letter from her father, recommending him to her good graces, as an honourable lover. Here, now, one would think, she might naturally show a little of the sex's decent reserve, though never

Old-Time Coquetry

so slightly covered. No, sir; not a tittle of it; modesty is the virtue of a poor-souled country gentlewoman; she is too much a court lady, to be under so vulgar a confusion; she reads the letter, therefore, with a careless, dropping lip, and an erected brow, humming it hastily over, as if she were impatient to outgo her father's commands, by making a complete conquest of him at once; and that the letter might not embarrass her attack, crack! she crumbles it at once into her palm, and pours upon him her whole artillery of airs, eyes, and motion. Down goes her dainty, diving body to the ground, as if she were sinking under the conscious load of her own attractions; then [she] launches into a flood of fine language and compliment, still playing her chest forward in fifty falls and risings, like a swan upon waving water; and, to complete her impertinence, she is so rapidly fond of her own wit that she will not give her lover leave to praise it. Silent assenting bows, and vain endeavours to speak, are all the share of the conversation he is admitted to, which, at last, he is relieved from by her engagement to half a score visits, which she *swims* from him to make, with a promise to return in a twinkling."

During her final years Mrs. Verbruggen lost her wits. One day, in a lucid interval, she asked what play was to be given that night at the theatre. *Hamlet*, she was told,

A Realistic Ophelia

would be the bill. She recalled her past triumphs as Ophelia, and she cunningly resolved on a farewell *tour de force*. Escaping from her attendants, she ran off to the theatre, where, hiding herself until the mad scene, she pushed by the Ophelia of the evening, walked out on the stage, and played the distraught heroine with a passionate frenzy that astounded and perplexed the audience. It was a tragic last appearance. She was taken home, at the end of the performance, and died soon afterward.

To return to Bracegirdle. She, too, began to think, as the years rolled on, of her own farewell. Time warned her that she was approaching the pathetic period of wrinkles, and she resolved to hasten from the scene before her popularity had waned. It is related, indeed, that she was hurried from the stage by the rising star of Anne Oldfield, and that she observed, with sad disgust, that her own performance, at the Haymarket Theatre, of Mistress Brittle, in *The Amorous Widow*, received less applause than did the Brittle of the younger actress. Be that as it may, Bracegirdle well understood the fickleness of the public, which often yawns when middle age plays young heroines; so she retired from professional life during the season of 1706–07, and sternly

Last Appearances

refused all offers to return to the boards. She was then on the wrong-side of forty, but she looked almost as blooming as ever, and could dance a country dance, when she chose, as gracefully as if she were a girl of fourteen.

Once, and once only, did she break her resolution, and then it was that she might appear at the benefit of her friend and mentor, Thomas Betterton, who was now grown old and gouty. It was on the 7th of April, 1709, "by the desire of several persons of quality," as the bills announced it in the snobbish cant of the time, that the performance took place at Drury Lane, with Bracegirdle as Angelica, in Congreve's *Love for Love*. Mrs. Barry, who had likewise left the stage, came back to play Mrs. Frail; Doggett was the Ben, and the aged beneficiary acted Valentine. It was a glorious occasion, of which many who were present in the great assemblage never tired, in after years, of describing to their grandchildren. The crowd was enormous, the excitement intense, and lavish was the applause bestowed not only upon Betterton, but on Bracegirdle, Barry, and Doggett as well. The stage itself was covered, excepting for the small space allowed the performers, with ladies and gentlemen, who were right glad

"Old Thomas"

to welcome "Bracy," as they affectionately called her, and to whisper among themselves such things as: "She looks as young as ever!" or, "I wonder, forsooth, if she *is* married to Mr. Congreve?"

When the moment came for the epilogue, written by Rowe, the enthusiasm had no bounds. Betterton stood in the centre of the stage, supported on one side by Mrs. Barry, and on the other by the Bracegirdle. Mrs. Barry delivered the epilogue, and there were tears and kindly murmurs when she came to the lines:

"So we to former Leagues of Friendship true,
Have bid once more our peaceful homes adieu
To aid old Thomas, and to pleasure you.
Like errant damsels boldly we engage,
Armed, as you see, for the defenceless stage."

A few more lines, and then the curtain came down for ever on the stage career of Bracegirdle. She had found, by the plaudits which greeted her at this benefit, that she had still a warm place in the hearts of the Londoners. In a little more than a year Betterton was dead. He had gone to another benefit, to play the fiery Melantius, in *The Maid's Tragedy*, and had been foolish enough to dip one of his gouty old feet into

Exit Melantius

a tub of water, that he might be able to walk on the stage. He got through the performance finely enough, but he died before the month had passed, and his poor wife, the ideal companion of his joys and troubles, lost her reason. She recovered her wits sufficiently, however, to make a will in which, among other bequests, she left twenty shillings to Mrs. Bracegirdle for the purchase of a mourning ring.

The Bracegirdle lived in quiet, honourable retirement for nearly forty years before death shut the once brilliant eyes which had played havoc with the affections of so many beaux. She was not forgotten; persons of distinction frequently visited her to talk over old times; and the poor of the parish wherein she dwelt had reason to remember her for acts of generosity. The world of the theatre was changing in a hundred little ways as the months flew onward. Bracegirdle saw not a few of the old comedies relegated to the pigeon-holes of oblivion, because of their indecency; and she was able to contrast the looseness of the stage life of the past with the new spirit of decorum. More than all that, she had the pleasure of watching the sudden rise of David Garrick, and of twitting her old friend Cibber, when that now ancient player and poet (he had

To the Abbey

been made Laureate for writing wretched verse) ventured to sneer at the young Roscius. When the gentle old lady sat in a box, and watched with appreciative eye the acting of the "little great man," it must have seemed as if the old *régime*—the *régime* of Betterton, Barry, Mountfort, Wilks, Powell, and the rest — were paying homage to the hero of the new school.

Anne Bracegirdle died in September, 1748, when she was eighty-five years old. The memory of her triumphs had not faded away, and veteran playgoers, who recalled how she had once captured their hearts, were glad that she was buried in the east cloisters of Westminster Abbey. One who had done so much to delight the English deserved a solemn place of sepulture, as if only to show that the players, in their efforts to amuse the public, are as great benefactors as generals, authors, or statesmen. Thalia and Melpomene were no longer regarded as two mountebanks.

" Had but my Muse her art to touch the soul,
Charm ev'ry sense, and ev'ry power control,
I 'd paint her as she was—the form divine,
Where ev'ry lovely grace united shine ;
A mien majestic, as the wife of Jove ;
An air as winning as the Queen of Love :
In ev'ry feature rival charms should rise,
And Cupid hold his empire in her eyes."

—*Lines to Oldfield, by Richard Savage.*

ANNE OLDFIELD

A Rising Star

THE player who can shine with equal lustre in comedy or tragedy, when such a *rara avis* can be found, is apt to slight the lighter Muse for her more sombre sister. But there was one of the craft who used to say, petulantly: "I hate to have a page dragging my train about. Why do they not give Porter [the great tragic actress] the parts? She can put on a better tragedy face than I can."

This daughter of Thalia was Anne Oldfield, who delighted the England of Addison, and Steele, and Marlborough, by her beauty, gaiety of spirit, and marvellous dramatic talent. There has never been another English actress to equal her for the infinite variety of her art, and but few to approach that personal charm which made the Oldfield a sort of theatrical Venus, to whom any critical Paris was sure to award the discordant apple.

Behind the Bar

So irrepressible was the genius of the heroine of our sketch, that we should like to imagine her the descendant of one of those inspired actors who played at the Globe Theatre, under the watchful eye of Shakespeare and Burbage. We have no evidence, however, as to such a fancy. What we do know is, that Anne Oldfield had gentle blood in her veins; that she was the daughter of an impecunious officer of the Royal Guards; and that she had a plebeian relation who kept the Mitre Tavern, in St. James's Market, London. She was born in 1683, and for the first few years of her life there was little amusement for her, save an occasional reading of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, or a pleasant visit, when she was not sewing bodices or hemming petticoats, to the aforesaid tavern. Here it was that she used to read the comedies of long ago, and that good-humoured, bibulous George Farquhar, army captain and dramatist, heard her recite *The Scornful Lady*. He was so charmed by her silvery voice that he made an excuse to get into the room behind the bar, where Anne was standing. When he had done so there came a sudden embarrassment on both sides. The girl of fifteen stopped short in her reading, while Farquhar, who had expected to see, at best, a

Anne Oldfield.

After an old portrait.



A Revelation

precocious serving-maid, hesitated in amazement as he beheld a tall, distinguished-looking young woman, with attractive features, eloquent eyes, and a finely cut mouth, half pensive, half smiling. Nance refused to continue *The Scornful Lady*, but she astonished the Captain by her "discourse and sprightly wit," and blushed prettily when he predicted for her a great future on the stage. Was not that the one desire of her heart?

The result of this interview was that Farquhar recommended the girl to the attention of Captain, afterwards Sir John Vanbrugh, who used his interests to have her admitted, in 1699, as a member of the Drury Lane company, at the modest salary of fifteen shillings a week. Her ambition, she declared from the first, was all for comedy. But she made little or no impression for a time. She was too modest to bring herself to the attention of the management, and it seemed as if all the golden prophecies of Farquhar, and Vanbrugh, and her relations, were to have no realisation.

Anne's opportunity came to her at Bath, in the summer of 1703, when the Drury Lane troupe moved down there from London to play before Queen Anne and the fashionable people who gossiped, or drank,

Merry Bath

or gambled, at the great English spa — the gay belles, the worldly mothers and fathers, the young fellows of twenty, fresh from a tour of the Continent, with all the latest manners of a French dandy, and the elderly rakes of thirty-five, worn out before their time. It so happened that the recent death of Mrs. Verbruggen caused a great scramble for her parts among the women of the company, and that but one of these parts, Leonora, in John Crowne's play of *Sir Courtly Nice*, fell to Mistress Oldfield. It was an unfeminine, plain-spoken *rôle*, viewed from modern standards, but she put such surprising spirit into it, when she came to act it, and looked so arch and lovely, that the audience was carried as if by storm. The beaux in the theatre forgot to praise the acting of Colley Cibber, as the elegant Sir Courtly—he who says that "men of quality are above wit," — but went about asking who was this ravishing Leonora. Such a figure, with so speaking a pair of eyes, and such a charm of voice and manner, they had never, they vowed, imagined before.

No one was more dumfounded by Anne's success than Cibber himself.

"Before she had acted this part," he writes, "I had so cold an expectation from her abilities,

Sir Courtly Nice

that she could scarce prevail with me to rehearse with her the scenes she was chiefly concerned in with Sir Courtly, which I then acted. However, we ran them over, with a mutual inadvertency of one another. I seemed careless, as concluding that any assistance I could give her would be to little or no purpose ; and she muttered out her words in a sort of mifty manner at my low opinion of her. But when the play came to be acted, she had just occasion to triumph over the error of my judgment, by the (almost) amazement that her unexpected performance awaked me to ; so forward and sudden a step into nature I had never seen ; and what made her performance more valuable was that I knew it all proceeded from her own understanding, untaught and unassisted by any one more experienced actor."

Cibber was an astute playwright as well as a good actor. He resolved to turn to advantage the talent of Mistress Oldfield in a way that would help them both. He had packed away in a pigeon-hole two acts of a comedy, *The Careless Husband*, which he had despaired of ever finishing, because there was no one among his associates whom he considered fit to play the principal character of Lady Betty Modish. She was a high-bred, high-strung creature, with a will of her own, a pretended contempt for her

The Careless Husband

lover, and of great fascination withal. Mrs. Bracegirdle, the one woman who remained to do her justice, had left Drury Lane to go into the rival company, and Mrs. Verbruggen was demented and dying. So the dust collected on the manuscript, until the triumph of the new Leonora caused the author to bring it back to the light, and to finish the story of Lord Morelove (the first gentlemanly lover in English comedy, since the Restoration, who was not a rake), of Lady Betty, of the empty-headed, gorgeously dressed Lord Foppington, and the virtuous Lady Easy. Cibber prided himself that the play was a great improvement upon the ribald comedies which then passed current. He was, in a certain sense, entitled to credit as a reformer, for the moral of *The Careless Husband*, inculcating, as it did, the necessity of matrimonial fidelity, was unimpeachable. But what audience of to-day would tolerate its coarse, although often witty dialogue, or the vulgar intrigues of Sir Charles Easy, that gentleman whose one idea of life—until the final scene—was to ogle pretty women of high or low degree?

But when *The Careless Husband* had production at Drury Lane, in December, 1704, as a result of Cibber's desire to see Oldfield

Lady Betty

as Lady Betty, critics and public alike considered it very decent, and, what concerned them more, vastly entertaining. As for Lady Betty, she burst upon the town with such airs and graces, such bubbling humour, such an assumption of aristocratic superiority and delightful impertinence, that she cast all her companions into the shade, and made of her impersonator, Mistress Anne, the heroine of the hour. For a short time Bracegirdle had to take second place in the esteem of Londoners, that they might crowd to Drury Lane to see the new star.

There is life in the old comedy yet. As we read over its yellow pages we only regret that the indelicacy of many of the lines prevents its revival by a modern company. How the defunct Daly Company, headed by Miss Rehan and Mr. Drew, would have given sparkle to the wit, the repartee, the airy sentiment, of the shifting scenes! We can fancy the *insouciance* of the Oldfield, as she stamped her small feet, in pretended annoyance, in the scene where the correct Lady Easy chides her for being so fond of dress and trifles. "'T is the beauty of the mind alone that gives us lasting value," says Lady Easy, sententiously.

"LADY BETTY. — Oh! my dear! my dear!

A Modish Heroine

you have been a married woman to a fine purpose, indeed, that know so little of the taste of mankind. Take my word, a new fashion upon a fine woman is often a greater proof of her value than you are aware of.

"LADY EASY. — That I can't comprehend; for you see, among the men, nothing's more ridiculous than a new fashion. Those of the first sense are always the last that come into 'em.

"LADY BETTY. — That is, because the only merit of a man is his sense; but doubtless the greatest value of a woman is her beauty; an homely woman at the head of a fashion would not be allowed in it by the men, and consequently not followed by the women; so that to be successful in one's fancy is an evident sign of one's being admired, and I always take admiration for the best proof of beauty, as beauty certainly is the source of power, as power in all creatures is the height of happiness.

"LADY EASY.—At this rate you would rather be thought beautiful than good?

"LADY BETTY. — As I had rather command than obey. The wisest homely woman can't make a man of sense of a fool, but the veriest fool of a beauty shall make an ass of a statesman; so that, in short, I can't see a woman of spirit has any business in this world but to dress —and make the men like her.

"LADY EASY. — Do you suppose this is a principle the men of sense will admire you for?

"LADY BETTY. — I do suppose that when I suffer any man to like my person he shan't dare to find fault with my principle.

"LADY EASY. — But men of sense are not so easily humbled.

"LADY BETTY. — The easiest of any. One has ten thousand times the trouble with a coxcomb. . . . The men of sense, my dear, make the best fools in the world : their sincerity and good breeding throws them so entirely into one's power, and gives one such an agreeable thirst of using them ill, to show that power— 't is impossible not to quench it."

If Leonora (a part which she afterwards discarded) was the means of bringing Oldfield forward on the stage, Lady Betty Modish permanently established her in the good graces of the town. From the production of *The Careless Husband* theatrical fortune smiled upon her, and when Bracegirdle retired to the domesticity of Howard Street the younger actress became at once the best-admired woman on the London boards. She richly justified her popularity, for she gave to the drama not only her genius, which was accidental and cost her nothing, but also a great enthusiasm and endless study. No amount of success could blind her to the uses of the latter, or make her believe that she had nothing to learn.

Rare Modesty

She never undertook any part without being anxious to receive all the help in it that offered, and she was quick to act on a kindly suggestion.

"With all this merit," observes Cibber, "she was tractable and less presuming in her station than several that had not half her pretentions to be troublesome; but she lost nothing by her easy conduct; she had everything she asked for, which she took good care should be always reasonable, because she hated as much to be grudged, as denied a civility."

Of Oldfield's sweetness of temper we have an attractive record in the pages of the *Apology*. Once, when Colley suggested to the elegant Mr. Wilks that he should take a much-needed rest, and drop out of the cast during a coming revival at Drury Lane (of which Cibber was then one of the managers), there was an angry scene enacted between the two players, with Mistress Anne and other members of the company as a greenroom audience. The face of Wilks grew black; there were sharp words, and finally Cibber cried:

"Are you not every day complaining of your being over-laboured? And now, upon the first offering to ease you, you fly into a passion, and

Green-room Discord

pretend to make that a greater grievance than t' other. But, sir, if your being in or out of the play is a hardship, you shall impose it upon yourself. The part is in your hand, and to us it is a matter of indifference now whether you take it, or leave it ! "

Thereupon Wilks threw down the paper containing the part of which it had been proposed to relieve him, crossed his arms peevishly, and stamped his heels on the floor. The polite Barton Booth, who was to have taken the place of Wilks in the revival, now came forward, and offered to withdraw in favour of his rival. " For my part," he said cheerfully, " I see no great matter in acting every day; for I believe it the wholesomest exercise in the world; it keeps the spirits in motion and always gives me a good stomach." A " good stomach " was an important thing to Booth, who was a handsome glutton, if ever one existed.

" Here," says Cibber, " I observed Mrs. Oldfield began to titter behind her fan. But Wilks being more intent upon what Booth had said, replied every one could best feel for himself, but he did not pretend to the strength of a pack-horse ; therefore, if Mrs. Oldfield would choose anybody else to play with her, he should be very glad to be excused."

Nance's Sunshine

At this Cibber took fire. It was but "an ill compliment to the company," he told the malcontent, "to suppose there was but one man in it fit to play an ordinary part with Mistress Oldfield!"

"Pooh!" laughed Oldfield, as she jumped gaily up from her chair, "you are all a parcel of fools to make such a row about nothing!" Then she said that Wilks should play the part, for she believed that "those who had bespoke the play would expect to have it done to the best advantage," and "it would make but an odd story abroad if it were known there had been any difficulty" among the members of the company. In short, the actress handled the situation with such tact, and illumined it with so much good-humour, that a breach between Cibber and Wilks was avoided.

It was this sunshine in Anne's volatile nature which inclined her to comedy, rather than to the melancholy paths of tragedy. Yet how she was wont, when she could not help herself, to draw tears from the audiences! They looked at her pensive features and glistening eyes, listened to her impassioned, natural delivery of pompous, artificial lines, and wept.

To recall her in serious drama is to think of Addison's well-written but inflated

Stilted Tragedy

tragedy of *Cato*. The play is now a sort of literary graveyard in which one occasionally finds, as upon a long-forgotten tombstone, some eloquent line or half-remembered adage. When Addison took the manuscript of *Cato* to Pope, the august poet said: "I think you had better not act it; you will get reputation enough by only printing it. The piece is well written, but it is not theatrical enough."

But the exigencies of politics caused *Cato* to receive theatrical presentation, for when certain of the Whigs heard that the author had constructed a play "to support the old Roman and English public spirit," they hailed it as something that would strengthen the principles of civic liberty, and deal a blow to the Tories, who were conspiring to reinstate the male line of Stuart as soon as Queen Anne should conveniently die. So *Cato* was put on for rehearsal at Drury Lane. The Oldfield cheerfully accepted the part of Marcia, Cato's daughter; Barton Booth, after some wrangling, was fixed upon for the title-character; the other *rôles* were duly assigned. Then anxious Addison, Mr. Pope, deformed in body but brilliant of mind, honest Dick Steele, and cynical Jonathan Swift, began to haunt the stage and green-room. Pope suggested several alterations

Stilted Tragedy

in the text of the play, supplied it with a prologue, and paid deferential attentions to Mistress Oldfield. He was less genial to her in later life. Parson Swift, who looked on with jaundiced face, thought little of the actress. She was only a poor player, in his eyes — and she had no influence to get him that always-coveted bishopric.

"We stood on the stage," he wrote to Stella, "and it was foolish enough to see the actors prompting every moment, and the poet directing them, and the drab that acts Cato's daughter out in the midst of a passionate part, and then calling out, 'What 's next?'"

Cato had an ovation when it was finally brought out. Whigs and Tories alike applauded its high-flown sentiments, and Lord Bolingbroke sent for Booth, between the acts, and presented him with fifty guineas, thus stealing some of Addison's thunder for the Tories. The play enjoyed a run of thirty-five nights. When Queen Anne graciously suggested that the author should dedicate the tragedy to herself, Addison was in a quandary. He had already proposed to dedicate it to Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, who was now sadly out of favour with her royal mistress. What was he to do? He did nothing; he escaped

A Distressed Lady

from the dilemma by inscribing his work to neither claimant.

So great proved the political significance of *Cato*, as both Whigs and Tories were determined to appropriate to their own party its praises of Liberty, that it may be thought there was no room for criticism of the players. But their work was appreciated. For Oldfield there was exuberant applause, which she deserved, for she gave to Marcia (who seems to us moderns to be no more than a lay figure, filled with primary-school sentiment) a wonderful beauty and dignity.

Oldfield was more at home, however, in depicting the sorrows of Andromache, in *The Distressed Mother*. This heavy play, an adaptation made from Racine by Ambrose Philips (the same Mr. Philips who once hung up a cane, which he threatened to use on Pope, at Button's coffee-house), was produced under exciting conditions. There was in the company a Mrs. Rogers, who laboured under the hallucination that she was a greater artiste than Mistress Anne, and who flounced about mightily when her rival was cast for Andromache. It was an outrage, said the Rogers, that the part was not given to herself, and she talked so loudly about her wrongs, and intrigued

Riot and Rivalry

so successfully with her friends, that the first night of the play found Drury Lane packed with her adherents. The programme was well arranged. On the appearance of Oldfield a riot broke out; soldiers were sent into the house to quell the tumult, and it was necessary, at last, to stop the performance.

"We have been forced," snarled Cibber, "to dismiss an audience of a hundred and fifty pounds, from a disturbance spirited up by obscure people, who never gave any better reason for it, than that it was their fancy to support the idle complaint of one rival actress against another."

But Oldfield triumphed, as she always did. Audiences soon flocked to the theatre to admire the melancholy of her acting in *The Distressed Mother*, and to laugh when she came out, with smiling face, to recite a comic and highly inappropriate epilogue.

"I hope you 'll own that with becoming art,
I 've played my game, and topped the widow's part.
My spouse, poor man, could not live out the play,
But died commodiously on wedding day,
While I, his relict, made at one bold fling,
Myself a princess, and young Sty a King."

Sir Roger

These comic finales to tragedies were not artistic. Nowadays we ignore prologue or epilogue, but we have our own incongruities in actors who come forward to bow their thanks to an audience after they have fallen on the stage in the agonies of death.

It was the play of *The Distressed Mother* that our old friend, Sir Roger de Coverley, witnessed in company with the *Spectator*, and it was of Oldfield's Andromache that he observes: "You can't imagine, sir, what it is to have to do with a widow." A little later, he whispers:

"These widows, sir, are the most perverse creatures in the world. But pray, you that are a critic, is the play according to your dramatic rules, as you call them? Should your people in tragedy always talk to be understood? Why, there is not a single sentence in this play that I do not know the meaning of."

The *Spectator* gives us many an entertaining glimpse of stage life during the early part of the eighteenth century, when Oldfield held sway. There was plenty of claptrap then, to please the gallery and detract from the best work of the actors. The *Spectator* is particularly severe on the custom of clapping an enormous plume on the head of every theatrical hero.

Stage Clap-trap

"This very much embarrasses the actor, who is forced to hold his neck extremely stiff and steady all the while he speaks, and notwithstanding any anxieties which he pretends for his mistress, his country, or his friends, one may see by his action, that his greatest care and concern is to keep the plume of feathers from falling off his head."

The heroines were obliged to have long, sweeping trains, which pages carried as the actresses moved up and down the stage, so that while the latter were indulging in wild bursts of passion, or wringing their hands in woe, the pages were engaged in one supreme effort to keep the trains from tripping up their mistresses.

We have long since banished the pages and the plumes from our theatrical world, but some of the absurdities which existed in the time of Addison have yet to be abolished. When he complains, for instance, of the custom of making a few "supers" do duty for a large army, one feels as if the gentle satirist were writing at the present moment. "Two or three shifters of scenes, with the two candle-snuffers, make up a complete body of guards upon the English stage; and by the addition of a few porters dressed in red coats, can represent above a dozen legions." Addison adds that "the

Poor Scipio

tailor and painter" often contribute more to the success of a tragedy than does the author.

Yet it was a peculiarity of Oldfield that when she appeared on the stage people forgot to be critical, to laugh at her pages, or to remark upon the smallness of a great monarch's army. She even gave grandeur to the dull *Sophonisba* of James Thomson, a poet who should have kept his muse locked up with the beautiful *Seasons*, instead of allowing it to stray into the theatre. When the tragedy was produced Colley Cibber, who always nourished, in his vain heart, a fondness for tragic parts, insisted upon playing Scipio—an indiscretion for which he was promptly hissed off the stage. Another actor, who took Colley's place, was mistaken for the veteran, and saluted with hisses and cat-calls until the house, finally undeceived, converted these sounds into roars of delight.

There were two famous lines in dreary *Sophonisba*. One of them,

"Oh Sophonisba! Sophonisba, oh!"

caused no end of ridicule at the expense of the poet, who was parodied by the celebrated,

"Oh Jemmy Thomson! Jemmy Thomson, oh!"

In Comic Paths

The other line,

"Not one base word of Carthage, for thy soul,"

was long remembered, because of its superb delivery by Oldfield, as she stood, in scornful majesty, annihilating with her eyes the amazed Massinissa.

When it came to comedy, Mistress Oldfield played with the enthusiasm of a child who has been let loose to enjoy herself, after a long siege in the schoolroom. In two comedies of Farquhar, who had discovered her, as it were, she made her humour unusually welcome. As Sylvia, in *The Recruiting Officer*, she masqueraded in masculine costume, to the edification of all the gallants who liked to look upon a pretty figure, while she proved hardly less attractive as Mrs. Sullen, in *The Beaux' Stratagem*. When the theatre echoed with laughter, as the latter play was being acted, poor Farquhar, who represented all that was sprightly, improvident, and careless in the days of Queen Anne, was dying by painful inches. During the rehearsals, Oldfield had said of Mrs. Sullen, who separates from one husband only to engage herself to another, Archer, that she thought the author had "dealt too freely" with the lady, in giving her to Archer, "without such a proper

Dying Farquhar

divorce as would be a security to her honour." Wilks, the Archer, went to see the dying Farquhar, and mentioned this criticism. "Tell her," laughed the playwright, "that for her peace of mind's sake, I 'll get a real divorce, marry her myself, and give her my bond she shall be a real widow in less than a fortnight." Farquhar had himself married a woman who pretended to be wealthy, when she had little or nothing, but he was faithful to his wife, after his easy fashion, and only retaliated by leaving her no fortune but two penniless daughters.

One of Oldfield's greatest comic successes was made, after she had passed the dangerous period of forty, in *The Provoked Husband*. This play was, in great part, the work of Cibber, who had developed the rough draft made by Sir John Vanbrugh, and it came very near being "damned," in theatrical parlance, by the Jacobites. These adherents of the Stuarts had chosen to take great offence at Cibber because he had ridiculed their cause in a former comedy, *The Non-Juror*. The opposition to *The Provoked Husband* was so intense, on the first night, that Colley gave up the piece for lost, but author and players triumphed in the end, as it ran for twenty-eight nights. It could hardly have been otherwise when Lady

Lady Townley

Townley, the uncurbed heroine of the comedy, had such sprightly performance from Oldfield. Lady Townley was a second Lady Betty Modish, a trifle more matured than that lady, and married to a husband whom she tantalised by her hatred of domesticity and her love of gadding about to routs and card parties.

"Have *you* ever any pleasure at home?" asks the frisky Lady Townley, all airs and graces, when Lord Townley remonstrates with her.

"It might be in your power, madame, I confess," says the husband, "to make it a little more comfortable to me."

"LADY TOWNLEY. — Comfortable! And so, my lord, you would really have a woman of my rank and spirit, stay at home to comfort her husband? Lord! What notions of life some men have!

"LORD TOWNLEY. — Don't you think, madame, some ladies' notions are full as extravagant?

"LADY TOWNLEY. — Yes, my lord, when tame doves live cooped within the pen of your precepts, I do think them prodigious indeed!

"LORD TOWNLEY. — And when they fly wild about this town, madame, pray, what must the world think of them then?

"LADY TOWNLEY.—Oh, this world is not so ill-bred as to quarrel with any woman for liking it."

. . . . . .

Lady Townley

"LORD TOWNLEY. — Now, then, recollect your thoughts, and tell me seriously why you married me?

"LADY TOWNLEY. — You insist upon truth, you say?

"LORD TOWNLEY. — I think I have a right to it.

"LADY TOWNLEY. — Why then, my lord, to give you at once a proof of my obedience and sincerity — I think — I married — to take off that restraint that lay upon my pleasures, while I was a single woman.

"LORD TOWNLEY. — How, madame, is there any woman under less restraint after marriage than before it?

"LADY TOWNLEY. — O my lord! my lord! They are quite different creatures! Wives have infinite liberties in life that would be terrible in an unmarried woman to take.

"LORD TOWNLEY. — Name one.

"LADY TOWNLEY. — Fifty, if you please. To begin then, in the morning — a married woman may have men at her toilet, invite them to dinner, appoint them a party in a stage-box at the play; engross the conversation there, call 'em by their Christian names; talk louder than the players; — from thence jaunt into the city — take a frolicksome supper at an India house — perhaps, in her *gaiété de cœur*, toast a pretty fellow, — then clatter again to this end of the town, break with the morning into an assembly, crowd to the hazard table, throw a familiar

Perennial Youth

levant upon some sharp lurching man of quality, and, if he demand his money, turn it off with a loud laugh, and cry — you 'll owe it to him to vex him ! ha ! ha ! "

In after days other actresses, including Woffington and the attractive Mrs. Spranger Barry, essayed Lady Townley, but none, apparently, ever gave to the character quite the touch, or just the same air of a woman of quality, as did Mistress Oldfield. People asked themselves in wonder if it could be true that she would never see forty-two again. She had the figure, the movements, and the complexion of a girl of eighteen, and she had a way of half closing her eyes, when she was about to indulge in some witty retort, that banished all suspicion of approaching middle-age.

One of the secrets of Anne Oldfield's perennial youth might be found in the fact that she never worried. She lived her life, sinned, was human and angelic by turns, with a pleasant look of enjoying the world that not even the moralists, who criticised her, could find over-much heart to condemn. " Even her amours," said one who knew her, " seemed to lose that glare which appears round the person of the failing fair; neither was it ever known that she troubled

Arthur Maynwaring

the repose of any lady's lawful claim; and was far more constant than millions in the conjugal noose."

Times and people were not strait-laced; the world looked on indulgently when the actress accepted the protection of Arthur Maynwaring. This Maynwaring was a literary *dilettante;* one of the most polished debaters at the famous Kit-Cat Club (where he could drink his three or four bottles, toasting the House of Hanover), and a right agreeable gentleman, even though he did dispense with marriage vows and churchly ceremonies. In early life he had been a warm adherent of the deposed James II., in whose behalf he had written an anonymous pamphlet, wrongly attributed to the facile pen of Dryden; but a position under Government, and a seat in the House of Commons, transformed him into a staunch Whig who thought the salvation of England depended on the existence of George I. He might have developed into a famous statesman, but he preferred to court the Oldfield, talk *belles-lettres*, or hobnob at the Kit-Cat with Addison, and Steele, Congreve, and the talented Sir Godfrey Kneller, who painted the portraits of all the members.

It was at the Kit-Cat Club that many a bumper was drunk to reigning belles, and

Genteel Flavia

that the praise of Oldfield often resounded, mixed in with grave discussions as to the affairs of England, France, and every nation under the stars. For this actress was the fashion off the stage, as well as upon the boards. She could be seen frequently on the terrace at Windsor, walking with duchesses and countesses, who clamoured to meet her, and loved to imitate her dainty gowns, her ribbons and laces, or her mode of headdress. "Flavia," as Steele christened her, was considered one of the "genteelest" of her sex, with aristocratic manners that were elegant from their very simplicity.

"This makes everything look native about her, and her clothes are so exactly fitted, that they appear, as it were, part of her person. Every one that sees her knows her to be of quality; but her distinction is owing to her manner, and not to her habit. Her beauty is full of attraction, but not of allurement. There is such a composure in her looks, and propriety in her dress, that you would think it impossible she should change the garb you one day see her in, for anything so becoming, until you next day see her in another."

Mr. Maynwaring died, in course of time, with the kind assistance of three physicians, and left his estate in three equal portions to

A New Friend

Mrs. Oldfield, their son, Arthur, and the testator's sister. Then General Churchill, a nephew of the great Duke of Marlborough, offered his attentions, but not his name, to the widow; she accepted him, and remained faithful to her new protector until he, too, passed away. Once it was rumoured that the two had gone to church to be married. The Princess of Wales, afterwards Queen Caroline, asked Oldfield, at a royal levee, if the gossips spoke the truth. "So it is said, may it please Your Royal Highness," replied the lady, "but we have not owned it yet."

One son, Charles, was the result of this second alliance. He married Lady Mary Walpole, and their daughter married, in 1777, Charles Sloane, first Earl of Cadogan. During a visit to the Continent, this Churchill was asked by a Frenchman if he was the other Charles Churchill, the poet. "I am not," protested the traveller. "*Ma foi!*" cried the questioner, "so much the worse for you!" In addition to her two sons, Oldfield was credited with a mysterious daughter, Miss Dye Bertie, who became the "pink of fashion in the *beau monde*," and married a nobleman. So it would appear, alas, that the actress was far behind Anne Bracegirdle in point of propriety.

Poetic Savage

But it is hard to be uncharitable to Oldfield, for she was herself so charitable to others. She possessed that ready generosity which characterises the majority of players, who would rather give than save, spend than hoard. One who often took her bounty was that disreputable poet, Richard Savage, the curious friend and *protégé* of the respectable Dr. Johnson. In their youth Savage and Johnson had wandered through London streets with hardly a penny between them. There were times when they could not pay for a night's lodgings; one night, when the two were in this predicament, they walked round and round St. James's Square, as in high spirits they discussed politics, and patriotically resolved that, come what might, they "would stand by their country."

Savage always claimed that he was a natural son of the Countess of Macclesfield, and worried that poor lady half to death by pressing his pretensions in the most unblushing way. The Countess would have none of him; but Anne Oldfield, more sympathetic than his reputed mother, gave him many a guinea, and once helped to save him from the scaffold. It appears that Savage and two other scamps, the three of them full of wine and ill-temper, pushed their way into the parlour of a pot-house, where some

Poetic Savage

roysterers were drinking; the latter resented the intrusion; swords were drawn, and in the brawl Savage killed a Mr. Sinclair, and cut the head of the barmaid who tried to hold him. The murderer fled from the scene, was arrested almost immediately, tried for his life, pleaded that he had killed Sinclair in self-defence, and might have been acquitted but for the shrewdness of Francis Page, counsel for the prosecution.

Page made an appeal to the jury that proved irresistible.

"Gentlemen," he said sarcastically, "you are to consider that Mr. Savage is a very great man, a much greater man than you or I, gentlemen of the jury; that he wears very fine clothes, much finer clothes than you or I, gentlemen of the jury; that he has abundance of money in his pocket, much more than you or I, gentlemen of the jury; but is it not a very hard case that Mr. Savage should therefore kill you or me, gentlemen of the jury?"

The jury promptly brought in a verdict of guilty. Savage's friends now made frantic attempts to have Queen Caroline, the wife of George II., secure his pardon, and Mistress Oldfield hurried off to ask Sir Robert Walpole to use his own influence in behalf of the vagabond. In the end, Savage

Tributes from Rascality

received the King's pardon, and was left free to go on playing the begging profligate. He was not lost to all sense of gratitude, for he never forgot the assistance of the actress, and lived to eulogise her memory in eloquent verse:

"—— So bright she shone, in every different part,
She gained despotic empire o'er the heart;
Knew how each various motion to control,
Soothe ev'ry passion, and subdue the soul;
As she, o'er gay, or sorrowful appears,
She claims our mirth, or triumphs in our tears.
When Cleopatra's form she chose to wear,
We saw the monarch's mien; the beauty's air;
Charmed with the sight, her cause we all approve,
And, like her lover, give up all for love:
Anthony's fate, instead of Cæsar's choose,
And wish for her we had a world to lose."

There came a time when Oldfield began to lose that wonderful zest for life on which she had always prided herself. Ill health caught up to her, as she was going joyously on entertaining the town: she suddenly found that acting had ceased to be a pleasure, and was become a burden. She struggled on, however, as most of her admirers little suspected her suffering, or realised why it was

Tragic Comedy

that in the midst of some sparkling scene of comedy she would suddenly walk to the back of the stage and turn her face away from the audience. She feared that they might see the tears of pain which wet her cheek. It was the tragedy within the farce.

On the 28th of April, 1730, Oldfield played Lady Brute, in *The Provoked Wife*, with all her accustomed spirit. But it was her last effort. She broke down after the performance, and was driven to her home in Grosvenor Street, to take to what proved to be her death-bed. There would be for her no more applause, or laughter, or admiration; she had done with Lady Townleys, Cleopatras, Violantes, and the rest of the immortal heroines. She lingered on for weeks, affectionately ministered to by her companion, Mistress Betty Saunders, a one-time impersonator of bouncing chambermaids, and the attendant to whom Pope referred in his half-malicious lines that immortalised the last moments of Oldfield:

"'Odious! in woollen? 't would a saint provoke!'
Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke.
'No; let a charming chintz and Brussels lace
Wrap my cold limbs, and shade my lifeless face;

Nance's End

One would not, sure, be frightful when one 's dead,
And, Betty, give this cheek a little red.'"

An act of Parliament, which was not repealed until the year 1815, provided that all the dead should be buried in woollen or flannel. It was an "odious" law, indeed, made to encourage the woollen industry, and although Pope's lines are purely imaginative, it would not be strange if the beautiful actress objected to such ugly grave clothes.

When Oldfield died, on the 23d of October, 1730, Betty laid out her mistress in a "Brussels lace head-dress, a holland shift, with tucker and double ruffles of the same lace, and a pair of new kid gloves." Then the body was taken in stately pomp to the Jerusalem Chamber, and afterwards buried in the Abbey, at the west end of the nave, beneath the monument of her old rival's friend, Mr. Congreve. Her two sons, Arthur Maynwaring and Charles Churchill, to whom Oldfield left the bulk of her substantial fortune, were chief mourners at the funeral. Many distinguished men went to the Abbey to pay their last respects to the woman who had so often entertained them at the theatre, and the pall-bearers were Lord de la Warr,

Funereal honours

John, Lord Hervey of Ickworth, Bubb Doddington, Charles Hedges, Walter Carey, and Captain Elliott. The whole ceremony was in pleasing contrast to the dog-like interment with which the French were wont to reward their favourite players, for whose poor bodies an unconsecrated grave in a saw-pit, or some equally unconventional place, was considered quite decent. The Dean of Westminster did, to be sure, refuse the permission asked by the Churchills to have a monument erected to Oldfield, but of the honours attending her burial there could be no doubt.

To Charles Churchill, Mrs. Oldfield left her house in Grosvenor Street, where he died, in 1812, eighty-two years after her own death. It is curious to think that this gentleman's memory of living players could stretch from his mother to the days of John Philip Kemble and the elder Mathews. More wonderful, however, was the longevity of Macklin, who united, as it were, the *régime* of Kemble with that of Betterton, and who flourished for more than a century.

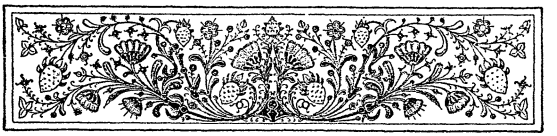
As the career of Anne Oldfield has an interest almost romantic for the layman, so has it, above that, a moral for the modern player. To read over the vast number of parts she played, either at Drury Lane or the Haymarket Theatre, is to learn how

Dramatic Merits

hard she worked, in spite of her genius, and to appreciate how much her art gained by this constant change of characters. Under the requirements of the old-time theatre, where "runs" were few, and short enough when they came, actors or actresses could not content themselves with two or three parts during a season. They had to be perpetually studying and creating. Had Oldfield been an actress of to-day she would, in all probability, have exploited a few comedy *rôles*, and neglected the serious drama altogether. As it was, however, her variety of expression, which was nothing less than inspiration, had noble scope. It was likened, in after years, to the versatile powers of David Garrick, when the veterans used to speak fondly of what Fielding had called her "ravishing perfections."

" In every sense of comic humour known,
In sprightly sallies wit was all thy own.
Whether you seemed the *cit's* most humble wife,
Or shone in Townley's higher sphere of life,
Alike thy spirit knew each turn of wit,
And gave new force to all the poet writ.
Nor was thy worth to public scenes confined ;
Thou knewest the noblest feelings of the mind ;
Thy ears were ever open to distress,
Thy ready hand was ever stretched to bless."

—*John Hoole.*



MARGARET WOFFINGTON

"She has Life"

"I HAVE been two or three times at the play very unwillingly; for nothing was ever so bad as the actors, except the company. There is much in vogue a Mrs. Woffington, a bad actress, but she has life."

Thus wrote cynical Horace Walpole to his friend, Sir Horace Mann, in the autumn of the year 1741. "A bad actress!" When we recall the triumphs of Margaret Woffington, the beloved Peg of the English and Irish theatregoers, we only laugh at a critic who had a keener knowledge of real people than he had of the stage world, and who saw nothing more in David Garrick than a clever mimic. Yet even Walpole was forced to admit that this actress had "life," and so, unconsciously, he indicated the power which enabled her to play upon her audiences with the skill of a magician. It was her animation of movement, her beauty, and her

Irish Charms

gaiety, which lent such charm to her comedy, and invested even her tragic *rôles* with a spirit that lifted them above the monotone of old-fashioned declamation. We almost begrudge the fact that Woffington appeared in tragedy at all, excellent as she was therein, for we can imagine her saying to herself: "I am too lively for tears; let me get away from Cleopatra, or Jane Shore, and return to my Lady Betty Modish, or Sylvia, or Sir Harry Wildair. Let me be once again the fine lady—or the fine gentleman."

A "fine lady" or a "fine gentleman" Margaret Woffington could surely be, without, of course, eclipsing memories of the Oldfield or the Bracegirdle. It was hard to believe, indeed, when one looked at the pensive, oval face of Peg, with the delicate features and the large, lustrous eyes, and noticed the distinction of her bearing, or the aristocratic shape of her hands, that she was the daughter of an Irish bricklayer and an Irish washerwoman. It seemed as if her family tree should bristle with peers and, perhaps, with two or three of those wicked old Plantagenet kings.

But the trowel and the tub made up her heraldic arms. Margaret Woffington was born in a squalid court in Dublin, on the



MARGARET WOFFINGTON.

FROM AN OLD PRINT.

Beggarly Childhood

18th of October, 1720. As a child she ran merrily, but shabbily, through the streets of the city, selling salad and water-cress to the passers-by, or she would stand in front of the theatre, to help her mother dispose of oranges, after that good lady had finished her day's washing. One who thus saw the girl, and became attracted to her because of her shaggy black hair, pretty figure, and piquant expression, was Madame Violante, the famous rope-dancer. Before she had reached her tenth year Peg was performing in the Violante's booth, where, as it is said, she made her athletic *début* by hanging from the feet of her mistress. Here she learned to sing, to dance, and to pick up and carry home to her mother the small coins thrown to her by admirers in the audience.

A little later the energetic Violante delighted Dublin by producing, with a company of bright children, the famous *Beggars' Opera*, which had enjoyed such a wonderful run over in London. The "star" of this juvenile performance was Peg, whose Polly, so declared the college students who saw it, was a marvel of grace and precocity. Her success in *The Beggars' Opera* now led her to other work; she played in interludes, danced, sang, and made herself so generally attractive that even the fashionable people

Ambitious Ophelia

of the town, who might not be supposed to know of the maid's existence, began to speak of her in praise.

From the booth of the Violante young Mistress Woffington soon passed to the Theatre Royal, in Aungier Street. There, for the first weeks, she was nothing more than a popular little entertainer. But she had a soul above her present duties; she longed to attack the legitimate drama. The chance came, oddly enough, with *Hamlet*. The Ophelia was ill, and the manager, at his wits' end for a substitute, was astounded when pretty Woffington, then not seventeen years old, offered to take the part. The young lady had her way, however. The night of February 17, 1737, saw her playing Ophelia before an enormous audience, drawn to the theatre by the announcement that the girl who had so often skipped about the stage and warbled for them was to venture herself in tragedy. This rash experiment ended in a triumph. There was a latent force and a rare dramatic intelligence in the new Ophelia, which even the squeaky tones of her voice—she had an "orange-girl pipe" that no art ever softened — could not mar. It is, indeed, a proof of Woffington's excellence in tragic paths that she accomplished what she did while hampered, as she always

Sir Harry Wildair

was, by thin tones which were liable to crack if she raised them too high in the excitement of passion.

Woffington's regular *début* as Ophelia established her at once as an actress of ability. She was quick to take advantage of her new position and to play the important parts which were now showered upon her. She need no longer descend to the coaxing of the managerial heart. Lucy, in *The Virgin Unmasked*, of Fielding, the coy Phillis, in *The Conscious Lovers*, of Richard Steele, and the dashing Sir Harry Wildair, in *The Constant Couple*, of Farquhar, were among the characters which she took. In none of them was she more fascinating, in a truly feminine and quite unmasculine way, than as the rakish Wildair. Her vivacity, fine form, and air of breeding made her, as her contemporaries agree, quite irresistible as the man-about-town; the part soon became one of the best, and most often acted, in her repertoire. When she came to match her Wildair against that of Garrick, she outshone "Roscius" in the character, and did it, strange to say, because she was a woman, and not in spite of that fact. One might think, as Garrick did, that Wildair should be played by a man, were it not borne in mind that the part itself, being more or less

On to London

impossible, calls for charm rather than for realism. As Woffington could give it that charm, far more than could any man, not excepting the sprightly Garrick, no one was disposed to complain.

One day Mistress Woffington bade farewell to her kind compatriots in Dublin, crossed the Channel in company with a *cher ami*, the handsome son of an Irish nobleman, and was soon settled down in London, very happy in the attentions of this gentleman and quite unconcerned as to the future. Stilted James Quin was then *the* actor of London; David Garrick, with whom Peg was to be so strangely associated in the future, had not yet electrified the town by appearing at the "late theatre" in Goodman's Fields.

The first garish romance had its end, like the Woffington's later romances. The son of the Irish nobleman was the one to end it on this occasion, and Fitzgerald Molloy has related, in his graphic memoir of the actress, how she revenged herself on the inconstant.* Hearing that he was about to marry a woman of fashion, she assumed the disguise of "Mr. Adair," an Irish gentleman, and patrolled the town, attired in "silken hose

* *The Life and Adventures of Peg Woffington.*

and satin breeches, with broidered waistcoat and wide-flapped coat, powdered, painted, and bewigged," to get sight of the new flame. Finally "Mr. Adair" got speech with the lady at Vauxhall Gardens, denounced the lover as a profligate, disclosed her own identity, and saved her unsuspecting rival from a wretched marriage.

"Mr. Adair"

From love and revenge Woffington was now obliged to turn her attention once more to the stage, that she might have food to put in her mouth. Nineteen times did she call on Rich, the peculiar manager of Covent Garden, he who thought far more of pantomimes than he did of the "legitimate"; nineteen times was she refused admission to the great man, because she foolishly declined to send in her name. Finally she murmured "Mistress Woffington." This proved a magic opener of doors, for Rich had heard of her Dublin appearances. The manager and the two dozen odd cats which kept him company received the actress very cordially. The cats sidled up against her dress, while Rich, more practical and less affectionate, offered her £9 a week for an engagement to begin at Covent Garden the following November (1740).

The offer was accepted, and the 6th of November found Woffington making her

Fair Sylvia

entry at the theatre in *The Recruiting Officer*, before a brilliant audience, which included the Prince and Princess of Wales. As Sylvia was an admirable part to test the comic temper of Anne Oldfield, so was it well suited to the spirit and *verve* of this sweet-faced Irish girl. The heroine is a rather self-willed young lady, whose love of manly sports does not detract a tittle from her feminine virtues, or—more important yet to the male members of an audience—from her powers of allurement. She can gallop all morning after the hunting horn, and all the evening after a fiddle; she can be her father's companion in everything but his drinking; she thinks a petticoat "a mighty simple thing," and is heartily tired of her own sex, but, for all that, she is herself a woman quite capable of leading to the verge of poetic distraction a score of dandies. Then, as if to cap the climax, she masquerades as a beau, and gives all the gallants in the audience a chance to admire the exquisite fit of her clothes.

It is not strange, therefore, that Peg captivated the house by her Sylvia, or that her name was soon on the lips of everyone who had the slightest pretension to a knowledge of the stage. *The Recruiting Officer* was repeated several times, after which she played

Young Mr. Garrick

Lady Sadlife in *The Double Gallant*, Aura in *The Country Lass*, Sir Harry Wildair, Phillis, in *The Conscious Lovers*, and other parts. The oftener she appeared the more did the wits and critics, and even the women, praise her beauty, as well as the natural, incisive quality of her acting. Only one jaundiced kill-joy dared to call her "an impudent, Irish-faced girl."

From Covent Garden the Woffington stepped over to Drury Lane Theatre, to play in a company which included bouncing Mistress Kitty Clive and harsh-faced but talented Charles Macklin, and to meet behind the scenes young Mr. Garrick — who now paid more attention to the drama than he had done to his wine business in Durham Yard. Garrick, indeed, fell madly in love with Peg, to whom he addressed impassioned verses and protestations, and so, too, did the fashionable Sir Charles Hanbury Williams worship at her shrine. The verses of Garrick are remembered no more, but there is still a sweet, familiar ring about the "Lovely Peggy" of his rival, Sir Charles.

"I stole a kiss the other day,
And trust me, nought but truth I say,
The fragrant breath of blooming May,
Was not so sweet as Peggy.

Sweet Peggy

"While bees from flower to flower shall rove,
And linnets warble through the grove,
Or stately swans the water love,
So long shall I love Peggy."

Sir Charles wrote the better verses of the two swains, but Garrick, who was about to blossom into a great actor, won the love of Peg. 'T was a curious household which he and Woffington set up for themselves some time afterwards. It was one that the "little fellow" did not care to think of when he married Mlle. Violette, and became, in private life, very conventional.

One of the interesting figures who now entered into Peg's professional career was Charles Macklin. During her first season at Drury Lane he was in the prime of his active life, and quite ready to boast, in his vigorous way, of being a descendant of an Irish king, through his father, a Presbyterian farmer of Ulster. But Macklin's early surroundings had not been regal. His youth was adventurous, after a Bohemian, unprincely fashion. He went to school, frolicked, became a stroller in England, and finally turned up at Drury Lane, after having changed his name of McLaughlin to Mecklin, and then to Macklin, as he made mighty efforts to get rid of his un-Shakespearian brogue. In the year 1735 he had killed a fellow-actor,



MACKLIN AND DUNSTALL IN "THE PROVOKED HUSBAND."

FROM A DRAWING BY DODD.

A Daring Departure

Thomas Hallam, in a petty quarrel over the ownership of a wig, but he escaped hanging, and was soon acting again as if nothing had happened. Yet it was not until he played Shylock as a serious character — not as the traditional comic Jew—that his real triumph came to him.

Macklin had long rebelled at the idea of regarding Shylock as a mere funny creation, designed for the amusement of the groundlings. He recognised the possibilities, human and dramatic, of this marvellous part, and detested the low-comedy impersonation of Dogget, who had given a clownish tinge to the money-lender quite foreign to the picture drawn by Shakespeare. At last, during the engagement of Woffington at Drury Lane, he sought to persuade Fleetwood, the manager, to revive the real *Merchant of Venice*, so long banished from the stage by Lord Lansdowne's poor "adaptation," *The Jew of Venice*. Fleetwood tremblingly consented. The rehearsals began, and Peg found herself cast for Nerissa. The Portia was to be Kitty Clive, who played that part as a hoyden, and liked to mimic popular lawyers in the trial scene.

It began to be bruited about that Macklin was to give a semi-tragic hue to Shylock, whereat Fleetwood, becoming frightened,

A Daring Departure

wanted to abandon the revival, and Quin predicted gruffly that the new Jew would be hissed from the stage.

But Macklin refused to back down; he held Fleetwood to his promise, and saw to it that *The Merchant of Venice* was produced on the evening duly advertised. The house was crowded from top to bottom with the finest company in town. The two front rows of the pit were full of critics, whom the new Shylock eyed anxiously through a slit in the curtain. He was glad to see them, for he wished "to be tried by a special jury." When he appeared in the greenroom, dressed for the part, with his red hat on his head, peaked beard, and loose black gown, all the players, save Woffington (who cherished an artistic sympathy for her fellow-Celt), stared at him in brutal amazement. The heart of the actor sank, as he heard the last bell, but he threw himself boldly on the stage, and was received, untried, with a veritable thunder of applause.

The opening scenes were tame enough, not being of a kind to test the effect of Macklin's innovation, but he found himself well listened to, even though he did not try to make the gallery laugh. "Very well! very well, indeed!" were the encouraging

cries which came from the pit. "This man seems to know what he is about!" He waited for the third act. There, as he felt, would he win or fail.

When he reached that critical point, with the contrasted passions, the malevolence, and the paternal grief of Shylock, Macklin threw into the scenes all his fire, and brought from the house a perfect uproar of applause.

"When I went behind the scenes after this act," Macklin tells us, "the manager met me, and complimented me very highly on my performance, and significantly added: 'Macklin, you *was* right at last.' My brethren in the green-room joined in this eulogium, but with different views. He was thinking of the increase of his treasury; they, only for saving appearances, wishing at the same time that I had broke my neck in the attempt. The trial scene wound up the fullness of my reputation. Here I was well listened to; and here I made such a silent, yet forcible, impression on my audience, that I retired from this great attempt most perfectly satisfied. On my return to the green-room, after the play was over, it was crowded with nobility and critics, who all complimented me in the warmest and most unbounded manner, and the situation I felt myself in, I must confess, was one of the most flattering and

Charles the Great

intoxicating of my whole life. No money, no title, could purchase what I felt. And let no man tell me, after this, what Fame will not inspire a man to do, and how far the attainment of it will not remunerate his greatest labours. By ——, sir, though I was not worth fifty pounds in the world, at that time, yet, let me tell you, I was Charles the Great for that night."

Pope well said of the new Shylock:

"This is the Jew
That Shakespeare drew."

There was a dramatic power, almost a ferocity, about Macklin's Shylock that caught the town, and even brought King George II. himself to see it. His Hanoverian phlegm was so roused by the performance that he hardly slept a wink the whole of that night. The next morning Sir Robert Walpole happened to wait on His Majesty, to express his fears that the House of Commons would oppose a certain measure whose enactment was desired by royalty. "I wish, Your Majesty," said Walpole, "it was possible to find a recipe for frightening the House." "What do you think," slyly replied the King, "of sending them to the theatre to see that Irishman play Shylock?"

Years afterwards the "sour-face dog," as Fielding once called Macklin, gave a more

Sans Memory

pathetic performance of Shylock. It was in 1789, when he was a nonagenarian. He came, all dressed for the part, into the green-room of the theatre, and said, in a dreamy way, to Mrs. Pope: "My dear, are you to play to-night?" "Good God! To be sure I am, sir! Why, don't you see, I am dressed for Portia?" "Ah, very true; I had forgot. But who is to play Shylock?" Mrs. Pope looked at him in pity. Finally she said: "Why, *you*, to be sure; are you not dressed for the part?" Macklin then seemed to recollect himself, as he put his hand to his head, and cried: "God help me! My memory, I am afraid, has left me!" He faltered through the part for a time, and then had to yield it up to his understudy. His memory had, indeed, left him.

To return to Woffington. As she went on playing at Drury Lane, Garrick took to the stage, conquered, and finally, after creating a veritable furore in London, went off to act in Dublin. The actress went with him. The two appeared there, at the Smock Alley Theatre, during the summer of 1742. Great was the enthusiasm when the Woffington played Sir Harry Wildair, to the accompaniment of cheers and the praises of Garrick, who told her, as he greeted her in the

The Inconstant

wings, that she was "the queen of all hearts." To this sentiment, it is chronicled, Peg archly replied: "Aye, queen of all hearts, yet not legal mistress of one." That looked, of course, like a hint, but there can be no doubt that the inconstant one in this flirtation was Peg herself. She never gazed with much favour on the restraints of matrimony. She liked a short life and a merry one, just as she cared for sprightly men and hated decorous women. The women, she poutingly complained, talked of nothing but "silks and scandal."

During this Dublin season, which ended late in August, Woffington acted, among other characters, Lady Anne in *Richard III.*, Cordelia in *Lear*, and Ophelia. She was the toast of Dublin, and departed from that city, with the no less popular Garrick, in a blaze of glory. The two were soon back in London, at Drury Lane, drinking the intoxicating draughts of public adulation. What a sight it must have been when they played together in *The Recruiting Officer*, she as Sylvia, he as Plume, or when they wandered off into tragedy, as his genius and her beauty and fire reanimated the old-time heroes and heroines! But the best of friends must part. There came the inevitable break between the lovers; letters and

presents were returned, according to the usual formula, and Garrick kept, as a memento of the past, a pair of diamond shoe-buckles. Says Macklin, who always harboured a grudge against Garrick:

"She waited a month to see whether he would return them; she then wrote him a letter delicately touching on the circumstance. To this, Garrick replied, saying: 'as they were the only little memorials he had of the many happy hours which passed between them, he hoped she would permit him to keep them for her sake.'"

Old Macklin hints that there was more of covetousness than of romance in this request from Garrick, but Shylock took the most malevolent view of the affair.

From housekeeping with Garrick, Woffington moved to Teddington, where she was joined by her sister, Polly. It was this sister who, after being tenderly cared for by Peg, married the second son of Earl Cholmondeley. The Earl, indignant that one of his aristocratic children should make such a *mésalliance*, repaired to the home of the actress, to express to her his disgust. To him the Woffington was nothing but a poor mummer. He was so charmed, however, by the grace of Peg that he declared, as he rose to leave her, that he was really pleased

Two Beggars

that his son had married her sister, although he had been "much offended" at the idea before he had paid this visit.

"Offended!" cried Peg, her shrill voice getting a trifle higher than was seemly. "Indeed, sir, *I* have cause to be offended now."

"How so, my dear lady?" innocently asked the Earl.

"Because, whereas I had one beggar to support before, now I have two."

When opportunity offered, Mistress Woffington left Drury Lane, where the presence of Garrick (now part patentee of the house), and the gibes of the sarcastic Kitty Clive proved annoying to her temper. She now joined the forces of Rich, at Covent Garden. Here she remained for three seasons, pleasing the town by her comedy and tragedy alike, and astonishing them, on one occasion, by appearing, in the *Coriolanus* of Thomson, as an old woman. The experiment was interesting, from an artistic point of view, but fortunately for the spectators, who loved to gaze on beauty, Peg did not get into the habit of representing wrinkled age. It would have seemed like flying in the face of theatrical Providence, had she drifted into such characters. But it must be recorded to her credit that she never depended for

Art and Energy

success, as certain modern actresses (?) have done, upon mere good looks. She was a tireless student, derived valuable instruction from old Colley Cibber, ran across to Paris, during a summer recess, to learn from the great Mademoiselle Dumesnil, and was indefatigable in her desire to play many parts. As Leigh Hunt said, she was "an actress of all work," but of far greater talents than the phrase generally implied.

With all her energy, and notwithstanding the praise lavished upon her by the public, Peg began to think that she was not properly treated behind the scenes. James Quin and Mrs. Theophilus Cibber were too often "starred" at her own expense, while she was frequently expected to jump into the breach because of the pretended illness of other performers, who did not choose to appear when a lazy mood overtook them. On one occasion, when Mrs. Cibber pleaded indisposition, *Jane Shore* was postponed till she might be ready to play in it, and Woffington was thereupon announced for Sir Harry Wildair. This was using the latter actress as a mere stop-gap. She became very angry, nor did her temper mend when she found that the bill advertising the change had very little to say about herself, but a great deal to say as to the future

Public Protest

appearances of her companions, whose names were set forth in conspicuous type.

Peg now tried the invalid subterfuge. At five o'clock in the afternoon, about an hour and a half before the performance of *The Constant Couple* was to begin, she sent word that she, too, was ill, begged to be excused, *et cætera*. This transparent manœuvre so angered the audience, as it shocked, no doubt, the virtuous players, that when she next appeared at Covent Garden she was met by a storm of protest. The public was, in brief, heartily tired of constant disappointment and changes of bill at the theatre, and had resolved to make an example of the latest delinquent, favourite though she was.

"Whoever," wrote Tate Wilkinson, "is living, and saw her that night, will own that they never beheld any figure half so beautiful since. Her anger gave a glow to her complexion, and added lustre to her eyes. They treated her very rudely, bade her ask pardon, and threw orange peel. She behaved with great resolution, and treated their rudeness with glorious contempt. She left the stage, was called for, and with infinite persuasion was prevailed upon to return. However, she did; walked forward, and told them she was there ready and willing to perform her character if they chose to permit her; that the decision was theirs—on or off, just

as they pleased, it was a matter of indifference to her. The 'ons' had it, and all went smoothly afterwards."

Tate Wilkinson

Tate Wilkinson, be it remembered, was not always on the best of terms with the actress. He publicly mimicked the squeaky tones which she could not banish from her tragic heroines. During an engagement in Dublin, he had the hardihood to caricature this "darling of the Irish," when he played Dollalolla in the burlesque of *Tom Thumb*. It must have been painful news to the Woffington to hear that her friends actually applauded the likeness, for she had called Wilkinson a "puppy," who would be "stoned to death" if he dared to ridicule her in Dublin. But Wilkinson was, in his different way, quite as unconscionable an imitator as Foote.

The uproar and the throwing of orange-peel on her reappearance at Covent Garden were the cause of Peg's departure from the house. She was wrathful at the way she had been treated there; she attributed no end of meanness or spite work to the manager, and she was in a general and highly unenviable condition of pique. So she declined another season's engagement at this theatre, swept away from it like an indignant

In Dublin

Juno, and went over to Dublin, to play under the management of Thomas Sheridan, father of Richard Brinsley Sheridan and the godson of Dean Swift.

On the 5th of October, 1751, Peg appeared at the Smock Alley Theatre, in the Oldfield's great part of Lady Townley, and entered upon a dazzling engagement, during which critics and nobility, pitites and gallery, extolled the finish of her acting, her elegance of deportment, and her powers for either laughter or pathos. Victor, the treasurer of the theatre, had seen Oldfield as Lady Townley, and when he wrote to Woffington that he had not witnessed a complete rendition of the part, since the death of the Englishwoman, "till last Monday night," the Irishwoman had a right to feel proud. "You know," he added, "she was called inimitable in that character by the author, Cibber, that great master of comedy; but, I dare say, even he will admit that epithet falsified by your performance."

Victor probably went too far in his enthusiasm when he sought to place the new Lady Townley above Oldfield. There is no doubt, however, that Woffington was very charming in the *rôle*, even if she could not reach the airy pinnacle on which Oldfield had stood. Certainly, the enthusiasm of

Gentle Rosalind

the audiences, often graced by the presence of the Lord Lieutenant's household, proved unbounded. Sheridan was delighted, nor did he complain as the guineas came raining into the box-office with a steady pour never before dreamed of in his managerial philosophy. Woffington was in the very zenith of her beauty and accomplishments, as she went from part to part, from Farquhar and the modern authors to Shakespeare, from Sylvia and Wildair and the like, to Ophelia, Rosalind, and Portia.

Her Rosalind must have been the most seductive of all her characters. The merry prattle, the innate refinement, and the undercurrent of tender sentiment of the heroine of Arden forest, were admirably brought out by this gentle daughter of the bricklayer, who inspired the muses of a hundred poets and gave sound to a hundred lyres, musical and otherwise. In the days of Shakespeare, who himself appears to have been the Adam of *As You Like It*, the handsome boy-actors played Rosalind; afterwards the comedy was shelved, to make room for an atrocious "adaptation" called *Love in a Forest*, wherein the characters of Audrey, Phebe, Touchstone, William, and Corin were eliminated. The years passed, until the real comedy was revived, in 1740, at

Gentle Rosalind

Drury Lane, with the tragic Pritchard as the very unsuitable heroine. Then came *the* Rosalind in the person of Woffington, who made of her an animated, sweet, playful creature, through all of whose badinage and blithesomeness one could detect the beating of a heart that loved Orlando. Curiously enough, a succeeding Rosalind had, like Woffington, to contend with an unmelodious voice. This was Mrs. Spranger Barry, who became, by turns, Mrs. Dancer, Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Crawford, and who was better in sudden bursts of passion than in parts calling for sustained excellence throughout. Like a little volcano, she would be fiery enough now and then, only to sink, after the explosion was over, into something commonplace and quiet.

Hardly less attractive than Woffington's Rosalind was her Portia. Many of us have seen the exquisite, womanly Portia of Miss Ellen Terry, which has always seemed, to the writer, as a latter-day exposition of the charm that Peg must have shown in *The Merchant of Venice*. Miss Terry has, to be sure, a vocal effectiveness, a pretty inflection, and a silvery cadence denied the dead-and-gone actress, but audiences were prone to forget the latter's pipe when she discomfited old Shylock in the trial scene, or

A Bad Voice

disported herself at Belmont. Once, however, the house was rude enough to notice the one blemish in the art of the Irishwoman. When Lorenzo exclaimed:

"That is the voice, or I am much deceived, of Portia,"

and Portia replied:

"He knows me, as the blind man knows the cuckoo, by the bad voice,"

a titter went through the impolite audience. But Portia, only too conscious of her failing, joined quickly in the laugh.

So great was the success of Peg in Dublin, so much had she become the rage both on and off the stage,—beaux, belles, scholars, and statesmen sought to do her social honour,—that she was re-engaged for the Smock Alley Theatre for another season, at a salary of £800 for the series of performances. But a Nemesis in the shape of the Irish Beefsteak Club, founded by Thomas Sheridan, put a temporary stop to her popularity. This club, composed of men of the highest rank, or ability, paid Peg a great compliment by electing her its chairwoman. She, charmed by the distinction, which was indeed remarkable when we consider that men do not usually care to have women at

A Club Woman

their convivial gatherings, presided with much aplomb over the dinners which the club was wont to take at Mr. Sheridan's expense. She entertained her subjects by the sallies of her wit, her captivating assumption of chairman-like dignity, and her quickness of repartee. But, oh, unfortunate day when she accepted the office! The members belonged, for the most part, to the "Castle set," which was then quite unpopular for political reasons; and the Irish theatregoers, such of them, at least, as did not belong to the fashionable coterie, had visions of Woffington and Sheridan drinking bumpers to the Government. Now the aforesaid Irish being very much "agin the Government" at that time, as they have been since, soon denounced the two Thespians as traitors, and waited for a chance to show their august displeasure.

The opportunity arrived when *Mahomet*, a tragedy, was presented. On its first performance the audience, already familiar with the play, snubbed Woffington and Sheridan, who both appeared in it, and applauded to the rafters certain sentiments that were supposed to have an indirect bearing on the wickedness of Government officials. When *Mahomet* was repeated, unwisely enough, there was a wild scene of disorder. Digges,

Plucky Sheridan

who played Alcanor, refused to repeat, in answer to an encore, a certain line anent "vipers" who sell the rights entrusted to them by the public; he retired from the stage; the performance came to a standstill, and the house resounded with ominous cries for "Sheridan!" The latter refused to cringe to the people, went quietly to his dressing-room, put on his street costume, and went home. But the storm was not to be stilled. The house was filled by a howling, shrieking mob. When Woffington came forward, hoping to quell the tumult, she was forced to beat an undignified retreat; then Digges tried, unsuccessfully, to effect a compromise. The pit wanted Sheridan, for the manager, it was understood, had added to his political apostasy by forbidding Digges, before the performance had begun, to declaim more than once the line about the "vipers."

Sheridan refused to stir from his home, despite the messages that were sent to him from the theatre. The men in the pit, finding that their prey had escaped, determined to wreak vengeance on the playhouse of the manager. The ladies were removed, and then came a scene which suggested the pleasant sport of a colony of orang-outangs. Furniture and fittings were destroyed, the scenery was ruined, and an

Back to England

attempt to fire the building nearly proved effective.

This put an end to a prosperous season. The theatre was placed in some sort of decent condition after a few days, that the players might have their well-deserved benefits, but the spell of the past was broken. Poor Sheridan announced that he had retired from the management, and Peg, though she was once more cordially greeted, soon betook herself to London, to reappear at Covent Garden Theatre.

From the autumn of 1754, until her unexpected leave of the stage on the 3d of May, 1757, Woffington remained at Covent Garden. As the weeks went on, keen critics noticed that she was no longer the Peg of the old days. She was still a young woman, for an actress, but the bloom of her beauty was fading, as her health began to decay. Be she ever so vivacious or impressive on the stage, she was not so sparkling a companion off of it as she used to be when she and David Garrick entertained the wits of the town at their joint establishment on Bow Street.

But however low she might be in spirits, there was one lady in the Covent Garden company who could make Peg's lustrous eyes flash with all their early fire. This lady was

The Bellamy

George Anne Bellamy, one of the most sensational persons who crossed the English stage of the eighteenth century. If ever woman had a chequered dramatic career, begun in luxury and ending in despairing poverty, she was the unfortunate. The Bellamy, who chanced to be the illegitimate daughter of a nobleman, was much sought after by Lord Byron. Declining all proposals, except "marriage and a coach," she was forcibly abducted by that fine gentleman, and afterwards rescued in a romantic fashion worthy of a stage heroine. As an actress she proved personally attractive, rather than great; her blue eyes and fair face, the elegance of her gowns, and her sumptuous mode of living made her the admiration of the men and the envy of the women.

It was the beauty of these gowns that once filled the heart of Woffington with all manner of dangerous thoughts. The two women, as the story goes, were to play in *The Rival Queens*—the same tragedy which had caused that little scuffle between stately Elizabeth Barry and Mrs. Boutelle. Now Bellamy knew that as an artiste she could not equal Peg, but she had a very clear idea of the value of feminine adornment. Therefore she sent over to Paris for two superb costumes—one of dark yellow, set off by a

Gowns and Discord

robe of royal purple—to be worn in *The Rival Queens.* They arrived in due course, much to the chagrin of the Woffington, who had nothing better for the coming performance than a faded straw-coloured gown that had belonged to the Princess Dowager of Wales. But let Bellamy tell the story herself, from the pages of her *Life,* as we make due allowance for her vanity and the prejudice against her rival.

"Thus accoutred in all my magnificence I made my *entrée* into the green-room, as the Persian Princess [Statira]. But how shall I describe the feelings of my inveterate rival! The sight of my pompous attire created more real envy in the heart of the actress than it was possible the real Roxana could feel for the loss of the Macedonian hero. As soon as she saw me, almost bursting with rage, she drew herself up, and thus, with a haughty air, addressed me: 'I desire, Madame, you will never more, upon any account, wear those clothes in the piece we perform to-night.'

"You are too well acquainted with my disposition . . . . to suppose this envious lady took the proper way to have her request granted. I replied: 'I know not, Madame, by what right you take upon you to dictate to me what I shall wear. And I assure you, Madame, you must ask it in a very different manner before you

Feminine Envy

obtain my compliance.' She now found it necessary to solicit in a softer strain. And I readily gave my assent. The piece consequently went through without any more murmuring on her part, whatever might be her sensations.

"However, the next night, I sported my other suit, which was much more splendid than the former. This rekindled Mrs. Woffington's rage, so that it nearly bordered on madness. When, oh! dire to tell! she drove me off the carpet, and gave me the *coup de grace* almost behind the scenes. The audience, who, I believe, preferred hearing my last dying speech to seeing her beauty and fine attitude, could not avoid perceiving her violence, and testified their displeasure at it.

"Though I despise revenge, I do not dislike retaliation. I therefore put on my yellow and purple once more. As soon as I appeared in the green-room, her fury could not be kept within bounds; notwithstanding, one of the *corps diplomatique* was then paying homage to her beauty, and, for the moment, made her imagine she had the power of control equal to a real queen. She imperiously questioned me, how I dared to dress again in the manner she had so strictly prohibited? The only return I made to this insolent interrogation was by a smile of contempt. Being now ready to burst with the contending passions which agitated her bosom, she told me it was well for me that I had a

Unrehearsed Comedy

minister to supply my extravagance with jewels and such paraphernalia. [Peg was referring to a diplomatist, a count, who was then in the green-room, paying his devoirs to Bellamy] Struck with so unmerited and cruel a reproach, my asperity became more predominant than my good nature; and I replied, I was sorry that *even half the town* could not furnish a supply equal to the minister she so illiberally hinted at.

"Finding I had got myself into a disagreeable predicament, and recollecting the well-known distich, that

"'He who fights and runs away,
May live to fight another day,'

I made as quick an exit as possible, notwithstanding I wore the regalia of a queen. But I was obliged, in some measure, to the Comte for my safety: I should otherwise have stood a chance of appearing in the next scene with black eyes instead of the blue ones which nature had given me."

The truth was, that the Parisian gowns had gotten the better of Peg's customary good-humour, and caused her to fall upon Statira with cat-like ferocity. Probably the "Comte" received most of the scratches.

For a time Bellamy counted her theatrical admirers by the thousands. She was the Juliet to Garrick's Romeo during the famous productions of the tragedy at the rival

houses; Quin told her she was "a divine creature," and Dr. Johnson remarked, in his heavy way, that "Bellamy leaves nothing to be desired." But what a pathetic ending was there to all this tinsel and glitter! The luxurious George Anne lost her looks and her suitors; debts haunted her day and night; she was even arrested, now and again, to be taken to the King's Bench. Her final appearance in Dublin, where she had once been an idol, is described by Tate Wilkinson in words that make a tragedy. The scene of her humiliation was *Venice Preserved*, wherein she played Belvidera.

A Wreck

"Expectation was so great that the house filled as fast as the people could thrust in, with or without paying. On speaking the first line behind the scenes,

"'Lead me, ye Virgins, lead me to that kind voice,'

it struck the ears of the audience as uncouth and unmusical; yet she was received . . . with repeated plaudits on her *entrée*. But the roses were fled; the young, the once lovely Bellamy was turned haggard! And her eyes, that used to charm all hearts, appeared sunk, large, hollow, and ghostly. Oh, Time! Time! thy glass should be often consulted! for before the short first scene had elapsed, disappointment,

A Wreck

chagrin, and pity sat on every eye and countenance. . . . She left Dublin without a single friend to regret her loss."

Truly the kind public is often merciless to its old favourites. Years afterwards, when poor Bellamy was in the depths of poverty, she had a benefit, at which she appeared on the stage seated in an armchair. The whole house stood up to greet her, as the elderly actress tried in vain to rise. Her feelings overcame her; she muttered a few indistinct words of thanks, sank back in her chair, and the curtain dropped on her for the last time.

"But see, oppressed with gratitude and tears,
To pay her duteous tribute she appears."

Long before Bellamy's last appearance her rival had taken her own farewell, quite unwillingly, and had been gathered to her fathers. It was on the tragic night of May 3, 1757, when *As You Like It* was played at Covent Garden for the benefit of two of the players and a dancer, that Woffington, always kind-hearted, offered to play Rosalind. People had begun to whisper that Peg was on the wane, that she was growing pale and middle aged, but her Rosalind still held sway, and drew, on this evening, a

Rosalind's Exit

brilliant audience. She was not feeling well, yet she thought little of her faintness, for many a time of late had she gone on the stage when she should have been in bed. So Peg contrived to get through four acts of the comedy without showing to the audience, or even to the actors, that all the gentle gaiety of Rosalind seemed to her a grim, wretched mockery. It was observed, indeed, that she had never played more delightfully; the critics actually forgot to ask themselves, as they had done of late, who was to be the Woffington's successor? Nothing, it was said, could have been more fascinating than the scene where, as the youthful Ganymede, she made Orlando swear everlasting love.

During the fifth act Peg, when off the stage, complained to Tate Wilkinson that she felt very ill. Wilkinson offered her his arm, which she graciously accepted, as he noticed that she looked "much softened in her manner, and had less of the *hauteur*." It was no time to remember with anger how he had mimicked her before a Dublin audience. She went back to the stage, and got as far as the lines in the epilogue:

"If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 't is true that a good play needs no epilogue," etc.

The Sad Epilogue

But when she arrived at the familiar passage,

"If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me,"

her voice faltered — she hesitated — tried to continue — broke down completely — and with a plaintive cry of "Oh God! Oh God!" tottered towards the wings, and was caught by one of her companions.

"The audience, of course, applauded till she was out of sight, and then sunk into awful looks of astonishment, both young and old, before and behind the curtain, to see one of the most handsome women of the age, a favourite principal actress, and who had for several seasons given high entertainment, struck so suddenly by the hand of Death, in such a time and place, and in the prime of life."

Peg had been stricken with paralysis. She lingered on for three years, and although she partially recovered, she was wise enough never to attempt to appear again upon the boards. It had always been her horror that she might lag superfluous on the scene, so she would have been the last person on earth to attempt to regain the favour of a town which would only regard her with cold regret. "Poor Woffington! how she

Reconciliation

has changed!" or "Peg has lost all her looks!" were not words that she cared to have said of her, as the speakers might gaze at her in contemptuous pity, or steal away to see David Garrick at Drury Lane.

In her declining days Woffington turned piously charitable, made her will, and waited for the inevitable summons. To her sister she bequeathed her jewels and several thousand pounds sterling, while it is said that she built, although she failed to endow, an almshouse at Teddington, where she had her residence. While she was dying she sent for George Anne Bellamy, to make peace with that restless lady; a reconciliation followed, and Woffington breathed her last on the 28th of March, 1760. Although she was only in her fortieth year, life had lost for her all its allurements. She was glad to make her exit. They buried her in a vault under Teddington Church, and erected to her memory a tablet inscribed with the name of "Margaret Woffington, spinster," and the dates of her birth and death.

So fell the final curtain on a lovely woman, a rare actress, a merry companion, and a generous friend. Peg was no saint, but a good-hearted, impulsive sinner, whose frailty has been forgiven in admiration for

A Pleasant Picture

her virtues. She will always have fascination for the reader of theatrical history. It is pleasant to picture this half-Niobe, half-Hebe, with the thoughtful, melancholy face that masked the laughing spirit.

'Scarce had our tears forgot to flow,
By Garrick's loss inspired,
When Fame, to mortalise the blow,
Said, 'Abington's retired.'
Gloomed with the news, Thalia mourned—
The Graces joined her train;
And nought but sighs, for sighs returned,
Were heard at Drury Lane.
But see, 't is false! In Nature's style
She comes by Fancy graced;
Again gives Comedy her smile,
And Fashion all her taste."

—*Horace Walpole.*

FRANCES ABINGTON

The Butterfly

THE stage is one of the most democratic of institutions. It gives the same opportunity to the ex-kitchen wench, if she has talent, as is does to a Vere de Vere, or a descendant of kings. A shining evidence of this truism is to be found in the life of Frances Abington, that shrewd, captivating woman, who emerged from her ugly chrysalis of vice and squalor, was transformed into a resplendent theatrical butterfly, charmed thousands by the delightful asperity of her comedy, and set the fashions in dress for all of her own sex.

Her early life was quite as humble, and by no means so respectable, as had been that of Mrs. Woffington. Fanny Barton was born in Drury Lane, about 1737, and passed a portion of her childhood in the unaristocratic precincts of Vinegar Yard, where her father, a one-time soldier, kept a cobbler's

"Nosegay Fan"

booth. Her brother was an ostler, who little dreamed, no doubt, that when his sister would become famous a pedigree, connecting the family with a distinguished house of Derbyshire, was to be provided for her by an enterprising genealogist. Other pedigrees equally shadowy have since been discovered for successful persons, who began life quite comfortably without them. The girl sold flowers in streets and inns, becoming known as "Nosegay Fan," and sometimes, as she had a curious, fragmentary knowledge of Shakespearian plays, she would stand upon a table in the Bedford or Shakespeare taverns, to recite to the guests familiar passages from the Bard. Then she turned servant, worked for a French milliner (who unconsciously encouraged the child's natural passion for dress), and earned small wages as a scullion. Worse might be told of her, but it would be unpleasant to dwell upon the wretchedness of these years, when Fanny, without a mother or a friend to watch over her, fell into evil ways.

But ambition, which has such power to make or mar, saved the wanderer. Fanny had become enamoured of the stage. When the rascally Theophilus Cibber, the worthless son of old Colley, secured a license to give

Frances Abington.

From a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds.



Startling Cleverness

performances at the theatre in the Haymarket, and asked his friend, Mistress Barton, if she would like to try a *début*, she readily consented. Out she came, in due course, as Miranda in *The Busy Body* (August 21, 1755). The audience was startled into enthusiasm by the spirited acting of this unknown girl with the pale complexion, snub nose, sparkling blue eyes, and elegant figure. Not only did she walk the stage with unusual ease for a novice, but there was so superior an air about her that it was hard to believe the stories anent her flower-selling, pan-cleaning days. She had not, to be sure, the manner of a woman of quality, which she afterwards caught so well, but she was, nevertheless, a marvel of gentility.

Fanny now made astonishing progress. Not content with playing such parts as Sylvia in *The Recruiting Officer*, and Prince Prettyman in *The Rehearsal*, she had the audacity to attack, with apparently creditable results, the character of Desdemona. From the theatre in the Haymarket she went to Bath, where she became a belle (her new manager falling madly in love with her); and she afterwards played in Richmond. She now came under the attention of James Lacy, who brought her out at Drury Lane Theatre. Poor Garrick! Had he known

Hard Work

how she was to pester him by her complaints in future seasons, he might not have regarded her arrival with favour. When she made her bow here, as Lady Pliant in *The Double Dealer* (October, 1756), she was billed as "a young gentlewoman appearing for the first time." Soon, however, Miss Barton acted under her own name. During four seasons she worked indefatigably, had many a wordy quarrel with the lemon-tongued Clive, whom she was destined to supplant, and built up for herself a fairly substantial reputation. Among her characters were Harriot, a "breeches" part, in *The Heiress*, Lucy in *The Beggars' Opera*, Lucinda in *The Conscious Lovers*, and Charlotte in *The Mourning Bride*. But her triumphs, and the perfection of her art, were yet to come. Her position, with a salary of but thirty shillings a week, was by no means a bed of roses. Mistress Pritchard, Kitty Clive, and Miss Macklin, the daughter of Charles Macklin, had a claim on all the best characters, and were disposed to look with jealous eyes upon the ambitions of this sprightly young girl, about whose past such strange stories were told.

The sprightly young girl was, however, determined to make for herself a career. Meagre as was her salary, she managed to

receive instructions from masters, that she might remedy the defects of her education —or rather that she might atone for the want of it altogether. Incidentally—for it does not seem to have been more than a passing whim—Fanny married a Mr. Abington, a royal trumpeter, who had been teaching her the rudiments of music. This romance was comparatively short, and far from sweet. Husband and wife soon learned to hate each other; the harmony of the music-lessons was replaced by discord, and Mrs. Abington finally suggested a compromise. If she were given her liberty, she said, she would allow Mr. Abington a small pension. He accepted; and thus ends his story.

Modest Mr. Abington

Frances Abington ever had a good opinion of her own acting. 'T is a sin for which she may be forgiven. But Garrick does not seem to have entertained extravagant ideas on this score during her first stay at Drury Lane; it was later that he discovered her genius, at the same time that he dubbed her "the worst of women." The fact was, that the golden opportunity for which the lady waited had not arrived. She had yet to make what the player of to-day calls a "hit." So she suddenly "eloped" to Dublin, in December, 1759, to play before the

New Perfections

Irish audiences. This move, conceived in recklessness, proved the making of her fame.

At the Smock Alley Theatre, where she had free scope, she played in a generous repertoire, ranging from Portia and Beatrice to the Widow Belmour in *The Way to Keep Him*, and the vivacious Kitty in *High Life Below Stairs*. The people of Dublin, "quality" and plebeians alike, immediately proceeded to lose their heads over the English stranger. "Such gowns! Such a taste in harmonising colour! Such a divine way of dressing the hair!" cried the women. "Such eyes!" said the men. "What life in her acting! How lovely, too, in spite of her *retroussé* nose!" The most fashionable among the Dubliners sought the honour of the Abington's acquaintance; ladies implored her to assist them in beautifying their respective toilettes; articles of dress which she had made popular were christened with her name. It was observed that she gave great breadth and a sort of sharp, frosty effectiveness to her comedy; that she so modulated her naturally shrill voice as to make it agreeable, and that her acting was full of delightful tricks, such as "turning her wrist, and seeming to stick a pin in the side of her waist," or "playing" her fan with the grace of an Oldfield. As a fine

"Beyond the Surface"

lady, or as a vixenish hoyden, the newcomer was considered inimitable.

Although she took, as Boaden says, entire possession of the stage, there was no arrogance, as yet, in her dignity; "she was a lawful and graceful sovereign, who exerted her full power, and enjoyed her established prerogatives." What she achieved was by no means the mere result of intuition. Her most sparkling effects, where all seemed to be done on the spur of the moment, were the result of cool, careful preparation. "She was always beyond the surface, untwisted all the chains which bind ideas together, and seized upon the exact cadence and emphasis by which the point of the dialogue is enforced." Perhaps the most eloquent, if somewhat indirect, tribute to all this excellence, was to be found in the millinery shops of Dublin, where caps labelled "The Abington" were on permanent exhibition.

For five years Mrs. Abington charmed the Irish, as she acted either at the Smock Alley Theatre, or at the house in Crow Street. Then Garrick, hearing of her popularity, made up his mind, like the astute manager he was, that it would be wise to bring so much talent back to Drury Lane. He accordingly offered her £5 per week,

The Widow Belmour

which the lady, who was just recovering her spirits after the loss, by death, of a kind "protector," agreed to accept. She came home to find her redoubtable enemies, Mrs. Pritchard and Kitty Clive, still at the theatre. But the Abington was a far more important personage than she had been in the earlier days, and she took care never to let her rivals forget the honours that had been showered upon her in Dublin. Her re-entry at Drury Lane was made in November, 1765, as the Widow Belmour in *The Way to Keep Him*. It was a part wherein she delighted not only London in general, but likewise so exacting a critic as Arthur Murphy, the author of the comedy. Years afterwards, when Murphy dedicated a new edition of the play to the actress, then no longer either young or lithe, he wrote to her:

"Without such talents as yours, all that the poet writes is a dead letter—he designs for representation, but it is the performer that gives to the draught, however justly traced, a form, a spirit, a countenance, and a mind. All this you have done for the Widow Belmour."

Mrs. Abington was now embarked on a dramatic prosperity that continued uninterrupted for many seasons, until the crow's-feet and the *embonpoint* which the years

Wit that Stabbed

bring, like grim avengers, warned her to quit the boards. During this brilliant period she created many new *rôles*, distinguished herself particularly by the acting of coquettes, chambermaids, country girls, and women of rank, and fully justified all that the Irish had said about her elegance and the poignard-like vigour of her humour. When she played the chambermaid her sallies of wit denoted the tart, clever woman of the people; when she played a heroine of the Lady Betty Modish order she was the sarcastic woman of breeding, who cared for no one's opinion, and whose words, as the actor King said, fairly "stabbed."

Yet in spite of all her love of the vivacious—in spite of her Millamant, Lady Townley, Mrs. Sullen, Lady Froth, and the like—we find her, in addition to such Shakespearian successes as Olivia, Beatrice, Portia, and Mistress Ford, doing Ophelia to the Hamlet of Garrick! Were it not that we have such a respect for the versatility of the old-time players, we might be led to fancy, wholly without warrant, that Abington made a poor Ophelia. But she was not the one to play a tragic part without due reflection or preparation, and it is safe to infer that she proved as adequate in this instance as she had done as Desdemona. The audiences, however,

Admiring Walpole

must have been far more in the mood when she gave point to the bristling badinage of Beatrice, while Garrick made mimic love to her as Benedick — and anathematised her in his heart.

During the year 1771 Mrs. Abington spent a long-needed vacation in Paris. Here Horace Walpole, who admired her very ardently in those halcyon days, heard of her arrival, and thereupon sat down to write the lady a letter worthy of a young incense-bearing gallant.

"It is plain I am old, and live with very old folks, when I did not hear of your arrival. However, madame, I have not that fault, at least, of a veteran, the thinking nothing equal to what they admired in their youth. I do impartial justice to your merit, and fairly allow it not only equal to that of any actress I have seen, but believe the present age will not be in the wrong if they hereafter prefer it to those they may live to see."

Prettily said, old Horace; what a pity that you did not continue in the same opinion. Later you were inclined to put down Abington as an actress of the second rank, instead of welcoming her to your home at Strawberry Hill as a queen of comedy.

On her return to England Mrs. Abington

Womanly Tyranny

became, in truth, so much a queen of the theatre, and so universal a theme of adulation, that she gradually grew inflated with her own importance. The sequel was hard on poor Garrick, who was led such a dance by this lovely tyrant that it is a wonder he did not contrive to rid himself of her entirely, in spite of her drawing attractions. To read over the Garrick correspondence is to find frequent traces of the airy impertinences, the subterfuges, and the petty treacheries of the charmer. Amid the war of words she managed to have her salary increased,—as, indeed, she richly deserved,—for we find this agreement recorded, under date of May 5, 1774:

"It is agreed this day between Mrs. Abington and Mr. Garrick, that the former shall be engaged to him and Mr. Lacy, patentees of the Theatre Royal, in Drury Lane, for three years from this date, or three acting seasons, at the sum of twelve pounds a week, with a benefit and sixty pounds for clothes; the above agreement to be put into articles, according to the usual form."

From now until the retirement of Garrick, the recriminating letters that passed between himself and the Abington were so numerous that one asks, in surprise, how the two had

Womanly Tyranny

time to act. Once he writes from his house in the Adelphi Terrace:

"Could I put you upon the highest comic pinnacle, madame, I certainly would do it; but, indeed, my dear madame, we shall not mount much if your cold, counteracting discourse is to pull us back at every step. Don't imagine that the gout makes me peevish; I am talking to you in the greatest good humour; but if we don't do our best with the best we have, it is all fruitless murmuring and inactive repining. Something too much of this. I shall write to the author of the piece to-morrow night, which I read to you. I have yet obeyed but half his commands, as he wrote the character of Lady Bab for your ladyship."

The author thus mentioned was none other than John Burgoyne, a gentleman who was a trifle better as a playwright than he afterwards proved himself to be as a soldier. But at this period, in the autumn of 1774, he had no premonition that he was to go down to history as a general who cherished too stupid a contempt for his American adversaries; he had never heard of Saratoga, and he was now chiefly interested in the coming production (November 5th) of his new comedy, *The Maid of the Oaks*. The piece proved to be tame enough as a literary

Lady Bab

effort, save for the all-pervading character of Lady Bab Lardoon, but it was made entertaining by music, dancing, and a spectacular gorgeousness that would not have been despised even in these latter days of stage pageantry. Garrick spent the sum of £1500 on the scenes alone, and took the greatest care that Burgoyne should have no cause to complain of the dress which enrobed the child of his commonplace genius.

But the brightest thing in the performance was the Lady Bab of Abington. This heroine was a variation of the Lady Townley type—a woman full of fashionable frivolity, but not lacking in heart, or in a half-hidden current of sentiment. When Abington figured, in the earlier scenes, as a town beauty, bewitching of costume and light of manner, the audience admired, quite forgetful that this high-bred actress had once been known as "Nosegay Fan," the frequenter of taverns and stable-yards. Nor was the house less pleased when she masqueraded as a pretty rustic, "Philly Nettletop, of the vale." In either guise Abington was at her ease. In no part of the entertainment was she better liked, however, than in her recitation of the playful prologue, where she addressed the critics, the gallery, and the fine ladies of the audience. That the fair occu-

Excusable Impertinence

pants of the boxes were not always held up as paragons of domestic virtue may be inferred from the Abington's bantering words:

" —— But stay ye—who be those,
Like flowers upon the banks in beauteous rows?
A dainty show of tulips, belles and beaux!
By goles, I 've found you out—sure as a gun
You are fine Ladies! What they call the *Ton!*
Oh! I have heard strange stories told of you,
What, play at cards o' Sundays?—is that true?
And when you money want, — still stranger news—
Like Macaronies, you are done by Jews!
That they examine you from top to toe!
Vat is your age, tiss propers tat I know,
Your looks are fresh and youngish, that I grant,
But dat complexion—is it health or paint?
If I must loan you, Matame, tell me all,
Vat vile lade hours, and maskerrate and pall,
Your gaming, influenzas, and the doctors,
Your debts, your gaming husband, and your broctor.
It cannot lasht."

There was a familiarity, a cool impertinence, in such lines that needed the touch-and-go manner of Mrs. Abington to render them palatable. It was her always-to-be-pardoned audacity, her talent for taking liberties with the audiences, that made the actress so charming a speaker of prologues

More Fighting

and epilogues. It was hard to condemn the sentiments of an author when they fell from the prettily sarcastic lips of this woman. Even when she once attempted, in Dublin, a burlesque scene with Tate Wilkinson, but abruptly ended it by playfully kicking him, and running off the stage, the house laughed amiably.

Several months after the production of *The Maid of the Oaks*, Mrs. Abington had a serious altercation with Garrick, which was punctuated by fiery correspondence. Here is an example of the actresses's complaints:

"Mr. Garrick behaves with so much unprovoked incivility to Mrs. Abington, that she is at a loss how to account for it; and her health and spirits are so much hurt by it, that she is not able to say *what*, or when, she can play. If he had been pleased to have given her a day's notice, she could have played her part in *The West Indian* [Cumberland's play], but it was not possible for her at three o'clock to read her part, get her clothes ready, and find a hairdresser all by six o'clock, and that, too, at a time when she is in a very weak and ill state of health.

"If Mr. Garrick really thinks Mrs. Abington so bad a subject as he is pleased to describe her in all the companies he goes into, she thinks his remedy is very easy, and is willing, on her part, to release him from so great an inconvenience as

Dignified Replies

soon as he pleases; and only begs, while he is pleased to continue her in his theatre, that he will not treat her with so much harshness as he has lately done."

This was pretty severe and uncalled-for language to pour upon the vexed head of the greatest, the most-petted player of the age. Garrick replied to the wail in a letter which is interesting enough to quote in full.

"ADELPHI, March 7, 1775.

"MADAME—Whether [it be] a consciousness of your unaccountable and unwarrantable behaviour to me, or that you have really heard of *my description of you*, in all companies, I will not enquire; whatever I have said, I will justify, for I always speak the truth. Is it possible for me to describe you as your note of yesterday describes yourself? You want a day's notice to perform a character you played originally, and which you have appeared in several times this season; you knew our distress yesterday, almost as soon as I did, and did not plead the want of a day's notice, clothes, hairdresser, etc., but you refused on account of your health, though you were in spirits, and rehearsing a new farce. You suffered us to be obliged to another lady, of another house, to do your work, when neither our distresses, the credit of the theatre, or your own duty and justice could have the least influence upon you. How could I give

Dignified Replies

you a day's notice when I knew not of Mr. Reddish's illness but in the morning?* and you were the first person I sent to between *twelve and one*, and not at three o'clock. It was happy for us that we found a lady, though not of our company, who had feeling for our distress, and relieved us from it without requiring a day's notice, or wanting anything but an opportunity to show her politeness. These are serious truths, madame, and are not to be described like the lesser peccadillos of a fine lady. A little time will show that Mr. Garrick has done essential offices of kindness to Mrs. Abington, when his humanity only, and not his duty, obliged him. As to your wishes of delivering me from the inconvenience of your engagement, that, I hope, will soon be another concern. My greatest comfort is, that I shall soon be delivered from the capriciousness, inconsistency, injustice, and unkindness of those to whom I always intended the greatest good in my power.

"I am, madame, your most obedient servant,

"D. GARRICK.

"Your refusing to play this evening has obliged me, though but just recovered from a dreadful disorder, to risk a relapse."

This was an admirable letter, which might have brought conviction to any reasoning

* Samuel Reddish. He was then a member of the Drury Lane company.

Without Reason

woman. But Mrs. Abington, who was not a reasoning animal when her temper or caprices were involved, did not want to be convinced. She rather liked the excitement of a tiff with the great man, who was looking forward so eagerly to his own retirement. So she wrote a counter-protest to Garrick, in which she said, with an amusing assumption of a virtue that she had not:

"I have, however, been too attentive to my business, and too faithful a servant both to you, Sir, and to the public, to suffer from such malice and ill-nature; and if you refuse me the indulgence that is due to me for all the labour and attention I have given to the theatre, for this winter in particular, and for many years past, I must at least remember what is due to myself; and if the newspapers are to be made the vehicles of your resentment to me, I must justify myself in the best manner I can."

This note was meant to sting Garrick, and it brilliantly succeeded. He was so indignant at being accused of intriguing with the newspapers, against the Abington, that he at once hastened to keep up the pen-and-ink battle. "If you imagine," he wrote, "that I in the least countenance, or am accessory to, any scribbling in the papers, you are deceived. I detest all such methods of showing

Little "Pin-Pricks"

my resentment." He ended by observing that "the writing peevish letters will do no business."

But Abington, now accustomed to the "peevish" mode of letter-writing, kept up the habit with charming insistence. Little pin-pricks like the following caused Garrick to tremble when he looked upon her too-familiar handwriting:

"I am very much indisposed, and desire to be excused when I tell you I cannot act to-morrow night."

"Mrs. Abington has great complaints to make to Mr. Garrick respecting a servant in his theatre for very impertinently writing against her in the newspapers last night, only for begging leave to sit in the prompter's box to see one act of a play on a night that she was to perform in *Bon Ton;* when her head was dressed, ready to begin the farce, which was the reason she could not so conveniently go to any other part of the house."

"The servant has brought me word that Mr. Garrick is very angry at my not attending rehearsal this morning. I do not believe him. I am sure Mr. Garrick did not expect I could be able to go out this morning, after the labour I have very willingly gone through for three nights past. I am ill to death, and really not able to stand."

Little "Pin-Pricks"

"SIR,—You will be pleased to let the manager know that I am ill (though I thank God I have not lost the use of my limbs, as he has been pleased to tell the public), but I am too ill to attempt to perform to-morrow night."

Garrick surely spoke with all warrant of truth when he wrote to the fair rebel:

"—— I never yet saw Mrs. Abington theatrically happy for a week together; there is such a continual working of a fancied interest, such a refinement of importance, and such imaginary good and evil, continually arising in the politician's mind, that the only best substantial security for public applause is neglected for these shadows." *

Never did man, who seldom understands the other sex, so accurately gauge the vanity of a spoiled woman. The spats between the two players became, of course, public property, and formed a congenial topic of conversation at balls, clubs, and taverns. One imaginative writer, who sought to show that Garrick was driven from the stage by the trouble which Mistresses Abington, Younge, and Yates gave him, invented this epigram:

* The Garrick-Abington correspondence is set forth in full in *The Life of Mrs. Abington*, which contains a rich store of biographical material.

"'I have no nerves,' says Younge, 'I cannot act.'
'I 've lost my limbs,' cries Abington; ''t is a fact.'
Yates screams, 'I 've lost my voice, my throat 's so sore.'
Garrick declares he 'll 'play the fool no more.'
Without nerves, limbs, and voice, no show, that 's certain:
Here, prompter, ring the bell and drop the curtain."

It was at about the time of Garrick's withdrawal from the stage that Mrs. Abington set up a handsome carriage. She was now at the very zenith of her fame. What Abington said, and how she looked, were things that one must know, if one had any pretensions to moving in the gay *Ton*. Her dresses were, more than ever, the theme of conversation and journalistic description. "What did Abington wear to-night?" would ask one sister of another just returned from the play. "A beautiful white lutestring, made close to her shape, sleeves to the wrist, and a long train, with her hair dressed far back on the sides, with curls below." When the actress imported a "Persian petticoat," all the women vowed that they, too, must have "Persian petticoats"; when she wore her hair with red powder, instead of white, there

Admiring Johnson

was enough excitement to do duty for a change of Ministry.

Yet it was the dashing Abington who not only had Fashion at her feet, but was also admired by Literature, as represented by crusty Samuel Johnson. It is pleasant to think of the old Doctor as he attended one of the lady's benefits, in company with Sir Joshua Reynolds (who painted her portrait), the listening Boswell, and a formidable group of wits. There they all sat in the front boxes, and filled Abington's heart with pride. The lexicographer was too deaf to hear much of the performance, but he endured it very patiently, "wrapped up in grave abstraction," as Boswell tells us, and seeming "quite a cloud amidst all the sunshine, and glitter, and gaiety." He spoke seldom until the prologue to the after-piece was recited. This he contrived to hear, owing to the distinct, slow utterance of the reciter, and immediately fell into a sententious discourse on the art of prologue-writing. "Dryden," he said oracularly, "has written prologues superior to any that David Garrick has written, but David Garrick has written more good prologues than Dryden has done."

When Boswell was bold enough to ask the Doctor why he had gone to the benefit, he got a truly Johnsonian snub. "Did you

Admiring Johnson

see?" asked the biographer. "No, sir," growled the Doctor. "Did you hear?" "No, sir." "Why, then, sir, did you go?" "Because, sir," replied Johnson, "Mrs. Abington is a favourite of the public, and when the public cares a thousandth part for you that it does for her, I will go to your benefit too."

The Doctor might have said, had he chosen to search his heart, that he went to the benefit not because of the public, or for love of the theatre, but because he was flattered by the attentions paid to him by the fascinating Abington. He was much pleased at being asked to sup with the actress, and very ready to boast of it afterwards. "Mrs. Abington's jelly," he said smilingly to his friend, Mrs. Thrale, "was better than yours, my dear lady." And Mrs. Thrale was nettled.

It may readily be taken for granted that in the line of "giggling, plotting" chambermaids, hoydens, and romps, Mrs. Abington had long eclipsed Kitty Clive. The latter had left the stage in 1769, and retired to a house which Horace Walpole placed at her disposal. In her the theatre lost a fine actress and a remarkable personality. Sharp of tongue as she might be, Clive was good-hearted enough to richly earn Fielding's

Bouncing Clive

praise of her as "the best wife, the best daughter, the best sister, and the best friend." Mr. Clive did, indeed, betake himself to oblivion by separating from the comedienne, but no one ever blamed her for the loss of her consort. It may be said, to her everlasting credit, that all the success she achieved, from Nell, the cobbler's wife, in *The Devil to Pay*, to Flora in *The Wonder*, was due to her comic genius rather than to her face. The latter was plain enough, in all conscience, but a merry twinkle in the intelligent eyes, and a sarcastic curl about the mouth, redeemed it from the commonplace. Goldsmith was so entertained by her acting in *High Life Below Stairs* that he declared Kitty had "more true humour than any other actress upon the English or any other stage," that he had ever seen. When Dr. Johnson ventured into the greenroom he paid particular court to Mrs. Clive, of whom he remarked to Boswell: "Clive, sir, is a good thing to sit by; she always understands what you say." And she used to say of him: "I love to sit by Dr. Johnson; he always entertains me." In other words, Mistress Kitty was a tactful woman who listened, with much show of delight, to the turgid observations of the Doctor, while he, as a consequence, thought her a mighty fine

Lady Teazle

actress. His opinion might have been different—for he was but a poor theatrical critic—had Clive been less attentive. Peace to her shade!

"Original in spirit, and in ease,
She pleased by hiding all attempts to please.
No comic actress ever yet could raise
On Humour's base, more merit or more praise."

The most brilliant triumph of the Abington came on May 8, 1777, when, at the fairly matured age of forty, she created Lady Teazle in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. Here is the historic cast, which more than one stage enthusiast has long since learned by heart:

Sir Peter Teazle	Mr. King
Sir Oliver Surface	Mr. Yates
Joseph Surface	Mr. Palmer
Charles Surface	Mr. Smith
Crabtree	Mr. Parsons
Sir Benjamin Backbite	Mr. Dodd
Rowley	Mr. Aickin
Moses	Mr. Baddeley
Trip	Mr. Lamash
Snake	Mr. Packer
Careless	Mr. Farren
Sir Harry Bumper	Mr. Gawdry
Lady Teazle	Mrs. Abington
Maria	Miss P. Hopkins
Lady Sneerwell	Miss Sherry
Mrs. Candour	Miss Pope

Sparkling Sheridan

Richard Brinsley Sheridan was a theatrical prodigy, if ever a man deserved the title. His forensic career is but a dim memory, enchanting as his wit and eloquence must have proved to his contemporaries, but *The Rivals*, and *The School for Scandal*, plays which he produced before he was thirty years of age, make him a reality to the modern theatregoer. For that let us partly thank the artistic taste of such players as Joseph Jefferson and Sol Smith Russell (both admirable as Bob Acres), the late Mrs. John Drew (who could play Mrs. Malaprop "to the manner born," and make, even in old age, a sparkling Lady Teazle), the late William J. Florence (who better as Sir Lucius O'Trigger ?), and Ada Rehan (a one-time Lady Teazle of spirit). *The Rivals*, which was produced at Covent Garden in January of 1775, was the play of which the young author had written to Thomas Linley, his father-in-law:

"There will be a comedy of mine in rehearsal at Covent Garden within a few days. I did not set to work on it till within a few days of my setting out for Crome, so you may think I have not, for these last six weeks, been very idle. I have done it at Mr. Harris's [the manager's] own request; it is now complete in his hands, and preparing for the stage. He, and some of



FRANCES ABINGTON, AS "LADY SADLIFE" IN "THE DOUBLE GALLANT."

FROM A DRAWING BY ISAAC TAYLOR.

his friends also who have heard it, assure me in the most flattering terms, that there is not a doubt of its success."

A Fine Cast

But the first performance of the play was a failure, principally because Lee made so poor a Sir Lucius. His place was taken by Clinch, and the comedy soon bloomed into popularity with a cast including Edward Shuter as Sir Anthony Absolute, Woodward as Captain Absolute, Quick as Acres, Mrs. Green as Malaprop, and Miss Barnsanti as Lydia Languish — a part afterwards well played at Drury Lane by Mrs. Abington.

But greater honours fell to Sheridan when, as managerial successor to Garrick, at Drury Lane, he there brought out his *School for Scandal*. The comedy lacked a certain freshness and naturalness to be found in *The Rivals*, but it was a more polished work of art, epigrammatic and scintillating, and so faithful a mirror of the artificial, easy, gossipy life of the period, that it won instant recognition. Frederick Reynolds tells how, as he was passing on the evening of May 8th from Vinegar Yard to Brydges Street, he heard a mighty noise overhead, and fearing that Drury Lane Theatre was collapsing, he ran for his life. But he found, the next

The New Comedy

morning, "that the noise did not arise from the falling of the house, but from the falling of the screen in the fourth act,—so violent and so tumultuous were the applause and laughter." And yet the audience had considered the beginning of the comedy so slow that one of the spectators cried, during the second act, "I wish these people would have done talking, and let the play begin." Other spectators, at other comedies, have had the same thought as they waited for the tedious preliminaries to be done with.

Garrick himself, who had taken keen interest in the rehearsals, sent his "best wishes and compliments" to the author shortly after the production.

"A gentleman who is as mad as myself about the *School*," he wrote, "remarked that the characters upon the stage at the falling of the screen stand too long before they speak. I thought so, too, the first night—he said it was the same on the second, and was remarked by others;—tho' they should be astonished, and a little petrified, yet it may be carried to too great a length. All praise at Lord Lucan's last night."

So great, indeed, was the success of the new comedy that several of Sheridan's enemies trumped up a story to the effect that the daughter of a London merchant had written

The New Comedy

the original draft. She had placed her play in the hands of Mr. Sheridan, they said, and then died, before she could accuse that gentleman of theft or plagiarism. This claim was sheer nonsense. We may be thankful that it was absurd, for posterity has thus been saved a discussion entitled, " Did Sheridan write the works of Sheridan ?"

It has been the fashion to say that no succeeding Lady Teazle has ever equalled the original. Possibly that is not too radical an assertion. It is at least certain that Abington was at her very best in the part. That is eloquent praise. In the ease of her deportment, in the airy exactions of a country girl turned into a fine lady, and in the snappish, incisive delivery of her lines, this actress seems to have had no formidable rival up to the present time. Walpole, who afterwards slackened in his enthusiasm, wrote to a friend: " Mrs. Abington was equal to the first of her profession; Yates, Parsons, Miss Pope, and Palmer, all shone. It seemed a marvellous resurrection of the stage. Indeed, the play has as much merit as the actors." When Miss Farren afterwards played Lady Teazle, good critics who had seen Mrs. Abington confessed that the latter was far superior in the part, excellent as was the Farren.

Sir Peter Teazle

Mrs. Abington was fortunate in having so clever a Sir Peter Teazle as Thomas King. It was this sterling actor of whom Charles Lamb, prince of dramatic censors, said that he left "a taste on the palate sharp and sweet like a quince; with an old, hard, rough, withered face, like a John-apple, puckered up into a thousand wrinkles; with shrewd hints and tart replies." King had been on the stage for nearly thirty years when he created Sir Peter; he had enjoyed the friendship of Garrick, who was not usually prone to intimacy with those in his company, and had received a dress-foil from the great man when the latter quitted the boards. He had the rare power of amusing an audience by dry, epigrammatic methods.

The other players in the original cast were all, more or less, persons of ability. William Smith, "the genteel, the airy, and the smart," might have been born a Charles Surface, so exquisitely did his private and professional traits fit him for the character. He was a gentleman, as the gentleman was known to Garrick, Fox, and Sheridan; he had studied at Cambridge, moved in the most polished ranks of society, and had become distinguished for his elegance of manner—the same elegance which the aristocrat of to-day would consider absurdly stilted

The Surfaces

and pompous. For the fine gentleman of comedy he was, therefore, eminently suited. He came by his breeding naturally, rather than by force of tact or genius. His powdered hair, folded hat, sword, knee-breeches, and ruffles, all sat well upon him; when he danced a minuet the spectator fancied himself in the drawing-room of a peer. Smith was, in fact, a precursor, albeit in a different school, of the more natural and modern Charles James Mathews. It is amusing to recall that he always stipulated with managers that his face was never to be blackened, and that he should never appear, or disappear, through a trap-door.

John Palmer, a smooth, polite man, fond of his pleasures, and an accomplished actor, was equally at home as the hypocritical Joseph Surface. "We have had dancing-masters in great profusion since his time," said Boaden, "but such deportment they have either not known, or never taught. He walked the stage in a manner peculiarly calculated to occupy it by his figure and action, and with a measured and rather lingering step." Palmer was always dodging duns and bailiffs. When a friend complimented him on his easy, graceful manners, the actor replied: "No; I really don't give myself the credit of being so irresistible as

"Poor Parsons"

you have fancied me. There is, however, one thing in the way of address which, I think, I am able to do. Whenever I am arrested, I think I can always persuade the sheriff's officers to bail me."

Yates, the Sir Oliver, was a uniformly correct actor, who liked to study a part with some living person as a model. William Parsons, the original Crabtree, and also the original Sir Fretful Plagiary of *The Critic*, was a born comedian. After his death Colman wrote a "prelude" which, when performed at the Haymarket Theatre, where Parsons had acted for a time, was found to contain a rare compliment to the talents of the deceased. In a conversation between the Prompter and the Carpenter of the house, who are discussing the necessities of the theatre, the former says: "Poor fellow! Poor Parsons! the old cause of our mirth is now the cause of our melancholy; he who so often made us forget our cares, may well claim a sigh to his memories." "He was one of the comicalest fellows I ever see," replied the other.

The remaining men in the cast all had their characteristics. By a curious coincidence, Robert Baddeley, the Moses, had once been a cook in the very kitchen wherein "Nosegay Fan" had served, years before, as

Dodd and "Elia"

a scullion. Dodd, the Backbite, was, in his day, an exquisite impersonator of empty fops, but he is now chiefly remembered by the description of his old age, which Lamb gives us in the inimitable essay on "Some of the Old Actors." "Elia" met the actor during an afternoon stroll. Could this grave, thoughtful man be Dodd?

"Upon close inspection I was not mistaken. But could this . . . be the same vacant face of folly which I had hailed so often under circumstances of gaiety; which I had never seen without a smile, or recognised but as the usher of mirth; that looked out so formally flat in Foppington, so impotently busy in Backbite; so blankly divested of all meaning, or resolutely expressive of none, in Acres, in Fribble, and a thousand agreeable impertinences? . . . The remembrance of the freedoms which I had taken with it came upon me with a reproach of insult. I could have asked its pardon. I thought it looked upon me with a sense of injury."

Of the women in *The School for Scandal*, it but needs to be said that Miss Pope (not Mrs. Pope, the former Miss Younge,) was one of the best actresses of her day, that Miss Sherry is now forgotten, and that Miss P. Hopkins was the daughter of Drury

At Covent Garden

Lane's prompter and the future wife of the classic John Philip Kemble.

The lengthy stay of Mrs. Abington at Drury Lane ended in 1782; for in the autumn of that year she went over to Covent Garden, there to be warmly greeted. One poet then sang of her:

"While Siddons melts the admiring town
Each night without relief;
Ah! where 's my favourite Abington,
To counteract this grief?
Come then by kindred souls held dear,
Your talents all employ,
Siddons shall draw the pitying tear,
You laugh us into joy."

At Covent Garden Mrs. Abington acted in many of her old parts, and did nothing to dim the lustre of her reputation until she had the foolishness to attempt Scrub, the man-of-all-work, in the comedy of *The Beaux' Stratagem*. This she did at one of her benefits (February, 1786). There was, of course, an intense curiosity to see how the actress would masquerade as the factotum to Lady Bountiful—he who drove a coach on Monday, drove a plough on Tuesday, followed the hounds of a Wednesday, dunned the tenants on Thursday, went to market of a Friday, drew warrants of a Saturday, and

A Dismal Failure

drew beer on Sunday. The theatre was crowded at an early hour with a brilliant audience, which included the widow of David Garrick. But what a disappointment! In Scrub Mrs. Abington was neither man nor woman — nothing, in fact, but a vulgar nondescript, making ghastly attempts to be funny, and looking by no means seemly in the masculine clothes which enveloped her now stoutish figure. The performance was a dismal failure, as everybody sadly admitted. The beneficiary was not sorry, therefore, to take a trip to Ireland, where she met with a gratifying reception. She was soon back again at Covent Garden; acted there for a time; then retired from public view in 1790, and returned to the stage in 1797, to once more play young parts. The Abington of the past could not return. The actress had lost her fine figure; her voice was no longer so carefully modulated, and her humour was degenerating into coarseness. But the town still loved her, though with less ardour, and was sorry when it finally understood that her appearance as Lady Racket in *Three Weeks After Marriage*, at the benefit of Mrs. Pope (April 12, 1799), had been her real farewell to the stage.

Mrs. Abington lived on, in easy circumstances, at her rooms in Pall Mall. She

Decayed Charms

enjoyed herself in a quiet way, played at cards, often losing money thereby, seldom went to the theatre, and dressed more like the wife of a humble tradesman than as the charmer who once had fashionable women and rich beaux bowing down before her elegant presence. Henry Crabb Robinson tells us, in his diary (June 16, 1811), of meeting her at a dinner given by Sergeant Rough.

"From her present appearance one can hardly suppose she could ever have been otherwise than plain. She herself laughed at her snub-nose; but she is erect, has a large, blue, expressive eye, and an agreeable voice. She spoke of her retirement from the stage as occasioned by the vexations of a theatrical life. She said she should have gone mad if she had not quitted her profession. She has lost all her professional feelings, and when she goes to the theatre can laugh and cry like a child; but the trouble is too great, and she does not go often. . . . She admitted the infinite superiority of Garrick, in genius. His excellence lay in the bursts and quick transitions of passions, and in the variety and universality of his genius."

It is pleasant to hear the old actress, now on the verge of the grave, say a good word for her one-time enemy, Garrick. Four years later she was dead and buried. She

had passed away on the 4th of March, 1815. In Frances Abington Comedy thus lost one of her greatest daughters. She was not an honour to her sex in private life, but as a player she was incomparable.

Decayed Charms

'Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy
In sceptred pall come sweeping by.''

—*Il Penseroso.*



SARAH SIDDONS

A Critical Estimate

AS we look back in cold blood, undisturbed by the bias of contemporary criticism, upon the majestic Siddons, she seems to have been a fine statue, endowed with unwonted life and fire when placed before the footlights, and relapsing again into marble calmness the moment that the curtain descended upon the mimic scene. There must, indeed, have been two Sarahs. One was the impassioned actress, the Queen of Tragedy; the other was the placid gentlewoman, emotionless, save in the love for her children, austere, parsimonious, and impassively selfish. It might almost be said that the soul in her was exhausted by the demands of acting, and had no further outlet in private life.

This great actress, like one of her brothers, John Philip Kemble, should have breathed the formal air of ancient Rome, but, as we

The Young Stroller

have seen in the TWELVE GREAT ACTORS, there was nothing Roman in the surroundings of her father, Roger Kemble. He was a stroller who, too often, played his stately heroes before British rustics who had never even heard of Romulus, or Remus, or Roscius, or Cato.

Sarah Kemble was born in a small inn in the main street of Brecknock, Wales, on the 5th of July, 1755, while Mr. and Mrs. Roger Kemble and their company were on a visit to that place. During her early years the Kembles travelled from town to town "on circuit," but the girl received a better education than might have been expected. Her energetic mother saw to it that Sarah attended such schools as came within their route. Occasionally the child would take part in some performance given by the troupe, coming on the boards, with other members of her large family, to essay a minor part when they played in a barn or shabby hall. There is, indeed, a pretty story to the effect that once, when she was rudely treated by a noisy gallery, she was led down to the footlights by Mrs. Kemble and made to recite the fable of "The Boy and the Frogs,"—a hint which the yokels took so much to heart that they kept respectful silence for the remainder of the



SARAH SIDDONS AS "LADY MACBETH."

FROM THE PAINTING BY G. H. HARLOW.

The Young Stroller

evening. At another time, when she was a little older, Sarah enraged an army officer, who had volunteered to act with her, by bursting into uncontrollable laughter in the most solemn moments of the play. We can fancy how, in after years, she would have glared dangerously had anyone dared to serve her in the same fashion.

But at this juvenile period there was no thought that the child would live to represent the Tragic Muse, as painted by the great Sir Joshua Reynolds. Roger Kemble admired her elocutionary power, and her beauty, which soon began to attract the attention of the country gentry, but he had no wish that she should adopt the stage as a profession. He possessed too keen and prosaic a knowledge of its hardships. It was only to add to the attraction of his strolling company that he allowed her to appear. There were times when the girl's usefulness was confined to the wings, and we hear of her as she stands beating a pair of snuffers against a candlestick to imitate the clicking sound of a windmill.

As the years go on, Sarah becomes the heroine of a romance. It is the one romance of her unemotional heart, and not very dashing or exciting at that. Henry Siddons, a very handsome, versatile, but wholly unin-

Henry Siddons

spired actor, joins old Roger's company, falls in love with Sarah, and is loved in return. Then the sweethearts become engaged to be married, not much to the pleasure of the parent Kembles. Next a country squire pays attention to Miss Kemble. She has won him, it seems, by the "coquettish" charm she gives to the song of *Robin, Sweet Robin.* "Coquettish!" Can we picture Sarah as ever doing anything coquettishly —even though she would afterwards be credited with singing a comic ditty?

However, *Robin, Sweet Robin,* was the source of mild woe. Roger Kemble and his wife wanted Sarah to marry the squire; while the young lady remained faithful to Siddons, at the same time that she sternly refused to elope with the latter. Thereupon Roger discharged Henry, who was given the privilege of a final benefit, that he might not go away penniless. What did the love-lorn swain do at this benefit but recite a wretched poem of his own composition, which informed the audience that he was being cast off by the Kembles! Mrs. Roger bit her lips in anger as she listened to him; when he came off the stage she threw herself upon the presumptuous actor, and boxed his ears. Siddons now took himself off, while the girl was sent to Warwickshire,

Romance and Matrimony

where she played a new part, that of lady's maid to a woman of quality, and recited Shakespeare, indiscriminately, in drawing-room or servants' hall.

Siddons seems to have had more spirit at this stage of his career than he afterwards displayed. He contrived to steal several interviews with Sarah, and so urgently pressed his suit that he finally married her in Trinity Church, Coventry, in November of 1773, after the girl had gone back from Warwickshire to her parents. The happy pair now played in various country towns, light of heart and of purse. The wife was full of vague ambition; the husband was kind, more interested in the future of Sarah than in his own, and always willing to act anything from Macbeth to Harlequin. Poor Henry Siddons! He is a weak man, who is soon to sink into respectable obscurity, but he is a rather forlorn, pathetic figure, as we see his own dramatic star gradually fading away as that of his spouse grows brighter and brighter. Mrs. Siddons will always cherish a peaceful, platonic affection for him, even when he will be foolish enough to lose some of her earnings through unfortunate speculation, but she will never care for him as she does for her children — those children whom she will so flaunt

Flashes of Genius

before the public as to make of them almost a jest.

We get several glimpses of the actress during the days following her marriage. At Wolverhampton she played with her father, as Charlotte Rusport in *The West Indian*, and as Leonora in *The Padlock*. At Cheltenham, then much frequented by people of fashion, she had an experience which indicates that her tragic genius was already beginning to shine, albeit in fitful, uncertain flashes. No sooner was it announced that she was to appear there as Belvidera in *Venice Preserved*, than the men and women of rank who attended the local theatre, in search of fun rather than of art, looked forward to a burlesque performance. The average strollers who came to Cheltenham had a way of murdering Otway, or Rowe, or Shakespeare that was irresistibly ludicrous. When the new Belvidera went on the stage, in the presence of the cynics, she knew that they had come to see a parody, not a tragedy, and she was wretched in consequence. Once she thought that the occupants of the boxes were laughing at her acting. She went to her humble lodgings, after the final curtain had fallen, quite weary and sick at heart. But a pleasant surprise was in store for the young aspirant. The

Garrick's Offer

very next morning a nobleman ran up to Mr. Siddons, whom he met on the street, to say how delighted all in the boxes had been with the performance of Mrs. Siddons. It was a veritable "triumph," so declared the enthusiastic critic. When the actress heard these praises she began to hope that her ambition to rise above the condition of a stroller was not idle longing.

The interest of the before-mentioned nobleman went further than mere compliment. Members of his influential family spoke of Mrs. Siddons to David Garrick, who was then planning his farewell to the stage. The great actor sent Thomas King (he who later played Sir Peter to the Lady Teazle of Mrs. Abington) down to Cheltenham to gauge the merits of the young lady. King saw her in *The Fair Penitent*, and was favourably impressed by her acting. The result was that Garrick wrote to Mrs. Siddons, offering her a season's engagement at Drury Lane, at a salary of £5 a week. She was only too glad to accept the proposition. We might say that she was enchanted, were it not that this is too emotional a term to be used for so self-poised a person.

Mrs. Siddons now hurried up to London, with a mind filled by golden visions of success. Garrick was charmed by her beauty

Sad Failure

and the queenliness of her tall, graceful figure. He paid her the most pronounced attentions, talked to her vivaciously, and sat next to her in the greenroom. Mrs. Abington, Mrs. Yates, and Miss Younge, who considered themselves a triumvirate of feminine power, endowed by Providence with the right to bully Garrick to their hearts' content, were furious at this favouritism. Many were the angry glances and the snubs which they directed at the newcomer, nor were they pleased when "Roscius" allowed her to walk around the stage as the lovely Venus in the pageant of *The Jubilee*. It was a trying position for a young woman of twenty, who needed all the sympathy she could procure in her effort to win London's approval.

Late in the month of December, 1775, Mrs. Siddons made her regular *début* at Drury Lane as Portia, with King as the Shylock. She was billed as "a young lady, being her first appearance." The performance was a ghastly failure. Portia looked very pretty, in spite of unbecoming, shabby dresses, but she was frightfully nervous, her voice was tremulous and indistinct, and the people in the pit could hardly understand a word that she said until she came to the trial scene. Here she collected her scattered

Courageous Portia

wits, and showed some elocutionary talent, but not enough to redeem the colourless atmosphere of her whole creation. The critics handled her severely, with the exception of the Reverend Mr. Bates, of the *Morning Post*. That newspaper made due allowance for the "great natural diffidence" of the novice, and gave "no unpromising presage of her future excellence." This is the sort of criticism a dramatic reviewer bestows on a poor player for whom he is anxious to say a kind word. Mr. Bates had reason to treat Mrs. Siddons politely. Was not Garrick about to produce *The Blackamoor Washed White*, a piece written by the critic himself?

Immediately after New Year's Mrs. Siddons, by no means daunted, repeated Portia with somewhat better results. Subsequently she played Epicoene in *The Silent Woman*, Julia in *The Blackamoor Washed White*, Emily in *The Runaway*, Maria in *Love's Metamorphosis*, Mrs. Strickland in *The Suspicious Husband*, and Lady Anne to the Richard III. of Garrick. In all of these performances there was little sign of greatness, or hint of the Siddons of the future. Public and critics alike regarded her with indifference. Of her acting in *The Blackamoor Washed White*, one newspaper said that "all played well except Mrs. Siddons,

In the Provinces

who, having no comedy in her nature, rendered that ridiculous which the author evidently intended to be pleasant." There was a great truth in this paragraph. Never, then or later, had Sarah Siddons a bit of comedy in her nature, although she had a liking for it in her youth, and made rather elephantine attempts at gay Rosalind in after years.

Her final appearance under Garrick's management was as Lady Anne. She then went to Birmingham, to play leading characters, with the happy impression that Richard Brinsley Sheridan would engage her for a new season at Drury Lane. Bitter as was the recollection of her failure, she hoped that another engagement in London would make amends to the public. Then there would be no Garrick to hamper her! For this self-sufficient young lady nourished an idea, which she never discarded, that Garrick had been jealous of her powers, and had purposely given her unsuitable parts. A few years afterwards she said pettishly: "He [Garrick] did nothing but put me out. He told me I moved my right hand when it should have been my left. In short, I found I must not shade the tip of his nose." These insinuations were unfounded and childish. It is true that her characters for Drury Lane

A Polite Note

had been unwisely chosen, but there is every reason to believe that Garrick was kind, and even generous, in his conduct towards this unknown actress. We have not far to seek for the cause of Mrs. Siddons's failure. Her genius had not yet developed. She was unconscious of the career which tragedy, not comedy, had in store for her, and she lacked systematic training.

Sheridan, who was now installed at Drury Lane, had no reason to desire the return of this handsome, ineffective stroller. Mrs. Abington told him there was more in the girl than he chose to see — her experienced eyes detected signs of latent force—but the new manager only shook his head. Thus it came to pass that Mrs. Siddons received a polite note from Drury Lane, saying that her services there were no longer needed. She was more than startled; she was stunned, and overwhelmed with mortification.

Yet there was grand moral backbone to the Siddons, even if she was cold and repellant to many who encountered her in private life. She began fresh tours in the provinces, though she was in bad health, and gradually acquired that discipline and study which would stand her in such noble stead when she returned to Drury Lane. The variety of that discipline may be understood when

Winning Praise

it is said that during her experiences in several large towns of England she played Hamlet (though not often), Lady Townley, the Widow Brady in *The Irish Widow*, The Queen in *Hamlet*, Mrs. Candour, Lady Randolph in *Douglas*, Jane Shore, Lady Macbeth, Juliet, Beatrice, Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, and perhaps a hundred more parts. At York, where she acted under the management of Tate Wilkinson, Mrs. Siddons became a distinct favourite.

"In her Arpasia," says Wilkinson, "I recollect her fall and figure after the dying scene was noticed as most elegant; nor do I recognise such a mode of disposing the body in so picturesque and striking a manner as Mrs. Siddons does on such prostrate occasions."

Four seasons were spent in Bath, where the actress played on successfully, at a salary of £3 a week. She protested that she would never return to London, but there was, of course, little of sincerity in such an avowal. She was too aspiring an artiste to be content with the stamp of provincial approval. These were happy days at Bath, however, as she worked heroically, in company with her husband, who helped her in studying various characters, and even had the temerity to find fault if she did not act to suit his tastes.

Sheridan Relents

At last the rumours of her achievements penetrated to Drury Lane. The fortunes of that house were on the wane, now that there was no longer a Garrick to uphold its prestige. Mr. Sheridan bethought him that the woman who had made such a failure of it some years before might now prove a drawing attraction. So he made her an offer to return, which she, thinking of her former dismissal, received in triumph, and finally accepted. In May of 1782 Mrs. Siddons announced that she would bid farewell to her Bath admirers, in a revival of *The Distressed Mother*. Great was the curiosity of the citizens, for it was given out that she would produce before the audience "Three Reasons" to show why she should go to London. What did she mean? The evening arrived, Mrs. Siddons went through the play, and then stepped to the footlights to recite a poem of her own writing. This she suddenly interrupted by walking to the wings, and trotting out her "Three Reasons"—otherwise her three children, Henry, Sarah, and Maria. Then she continued:

"These are the moles that bear me from your side,
Where I was rooted—where I could have died.

Wretched Uncertainty

Stand forth, ye elves, and plead your mother's cause:
Ye little magnets, whose soft influence draws
Me from a point where every gentle breeze
Wafted my bark to happiness and ease—
Sends me adventurous on a larger main,
In hopes that you may profit by my gain."

An audience of to-day would look upon such an appeal to private feelings as theatrical claptrap, in the worst taste. Even in these so-called "degenerate" times there is far more dignity in the relations between the house and the player than once prevailed. The worthy people of Bath saw no incongruity in this scene; on the contrary, they vociferously applauded the family episode.

Mrs. Siddons did not make her re-entry at Drury Lane until the following autumn (October 10, 1782). When she came to town to rehearse the sorrowful Isabella in Garrick's version of *The Fatal Marriage*, she became a prey to the most violent anxiety. She knew that she was about to stake her whole future on this one performance. A second fiasco at Drury Lane would surely mean artistic damnation. Even the provinces might, in the event of so dismal an occurrence, refuse to receive her back with open arms.

Wretched Uncertainty

When the first rehearsal began, the Siddons was almost dumb from apprehension.

"I feared," she related, "to utter a sound above an audible whisper, but by degrees enthusiasm cheered me into a forgetfulness of my fears, and I unconsciously threw out my voice, which failed not to be heard in the remotest part of the house, by a friend who kindly undertook to ascertain the happy circumstance. The countenances, no less than the tears and flattering encouragements of my companions, emboldened me more and more; and the second rehearsal was even more affecting than the first. Mr. [Thomas] King, who was the stage-manager, was loud in his applauses. This second rehearsal took place on the 8th of October, 1782, and in the evening of that day I was seized with a nervous hoarseness which made me extremely wretched; for I dreaded being obliged to defer my appearance on the 10th, longing, as I most earnestly did, at least to know the worst. I went to bed, therefore, in a state of dreadful suspense.

"Awaking the next morning, however, though out of restless, unrefreshing sleep, I found, upon speaking to my husband, that my voice was very much clearer. This, of course, was a great comfort to me; and moreover the sun, which had been completely obscured for many days, shone brightly through my curtains. I hailed it, though tearfully, yet thankfully, as a happy

Triumph at Last

omen; and even now I am not ashamed of this (as it may perhaps be called) childish superstition. On the morning of the 10th my voice was, most happily, perfectly restored; and again 'the blessed sun shone brightly on me.' On this eventful day my father arrived to comfort me, and to be a witness of my trial. He accompanied me to my dressing-room at the theatre. There he left me; and I, in one of what I call my desperate tranquillities, which usually impress me under terrific circumstances, there completed my dress, to the astonishment of my attendants, without uttering one word, though often sighing most profoundly."

There was no need for sighs. Mrs. Siddons played Isabella with such passionate force, and rang the changes so superbly upon the different notes of the lugubrious part,—sweetness, tenderness, grief, and tragic nobility,—that the crowded audience went wild with melancholy delight. Strong men wept; some of the women went into hysterics. When it was all over the actress walked quietly home to Mr. Siddons. He had been too agitated, too fearful of possible failure, to trust himself in the theatre. Her own description of her return is one of the most graphic, yet unpretentious, pieces of writing to be found in histrionic literature:

"I reached my own quiet fireside, on retiring

from the scene of reiterated shouts and plaudits. I was half-dead; and my joy and thankfulness were of too solemn and overpowering a nature to admit of words, or even tears. My father, my husband, and myself, sat down to a frugal, neat supper, in a silence uninterrupted except by exclamations of gladness from Mr. Siddons. My father enjoyed his refreshments; but occasionally stopped short, and laying down his knife and fork, lifting up his venerable face, and throwing back his silver hair, gave way to tears of happiness. We soon parted for the night; and I, worn out with continually broken rest and laborious exertion, after an hour's retrospection, fell into a sweet and profound sleep, which lasted to the middle of the next day."

London waxed so excited over Mrs. Siddons that enthusiasm would seem but a poor word to describe the attention that she created, or the courtesies which were suddenly thrust upon her, almost against her will. During the season she played Isabella (twenty-four times), Belvidera, Calista in *The Fair Penitent*, Jane Shore, Euphrasia in *The Grecian Daughter*, Zara in *The Mourning Bride*, and Mrs. Montague in *The Fatal Interview*. Drury Lane was crowded on the nights when she performed; the world of wealth, fashion, and royalty turned out to be thrilled by the fire of her acting; people

Money and Adulation

sometimes breakfasted near the theatre, that they could be the first to secure seats; ladies hovered near her lodgings, that they might get a peep at her as she went forth into the street. Percy Fitzgerald estimated that, in addition to all the adulation, Mrs. Siddons obtained about £1500 for this season alone —a circumstance which must have made a gratifying impression on the new idol, who always had a keen, and at times an undignified, love for pounds, shillings, and pence. It was said of her, half in earnest, half in jest, that she could never forget she had to support a husband and the inevitable "helpless babes."

Of course old Horace Walpole went to see the Siddons — he who remembered the first appearances of Garrick, and had sneered, in his day, at more than one fine player. "She pleased me beyond my expectation, but not up to the admiration of the *Ton*," he wrote to the Countess of Ossory. He considered her of "a good figure, handsome enough, though neither nose nor chin according to the Greek standard, beyond which both advance a good deal." Later on Walpole took a more emotional view of Siddons, and granted her the possession of greater genius than he had first allowed. But Walpole's praise or censure counts for nothing.

A Sublime Artiste

We have far better critics to tell us how sublime she was at this time, before she had come under the influence of her brother, John Philip Kemble, and caught something of the formality and declamatory preciseness of his art. She already had the grandeur, the majestic air, and the nobility which remained with her to the end, but she possessed, in addition, a fire, a power for pathos, and a naturalness of expression that seem to have been far less conspicuous as she grew older. Her calm face, which could look so terrible in the frenzy of anger or despair, and her gracefully rounded figure, were now at their best. While her art had not reached, perhaps, its highest development, yet if we could elect to be carried back into the past, to witness one, and only one, performance of Sarah Siddons, we might do well to choose a night during that first triumphal progress at Drury Lane — unless, indeed, we waited for her metropolitan trial of Lady Macbeth.

The Siddons was at this period the Queen not only of Tragedy, but likewise the Queen of London. The real Queen of the country, good, stupid Charlotte, excited not a tithe of the interest created by this mimic sovereign. Nor had the latter among her admirers, at whom she must have smiled in an austere, condescendingly frigid fashion, a

Incense from Johnson

more fervent one than Dr. Johnson. When Siddons paid the sage a visit, much to his delight, he received her with the stately ceremony due to so august a person. Upon his finding some difficulty in procuring a chair for the actress he said, with a smile and a bow quite worthy of my Lord Chesterfield: "Madame, you who so often occasion a want of seats to other people, will the more easily excuse the want of one yourself." When the two were at last seated, the Doctor asked Mrs. Siddons which one of Shakespeare's characters she liked the best. The character of Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII.* was the most natural, she answered. "I think so, too, Madame," gallantly said Johnson, "and whenever you perform it I will once more hobble out to the theatre myself." Mrs. Siddons promised to do herself the honour of acting Queen Katherine before the Doctor. But he did not live to see her in the part.

Shortly after the Muse of Tragedy had called upon him, Johnson wrote to Mrs. Thrale:

"Mrs. Siddons, in her visit to me, behaved with great modesty and propriety, and left nothing behind her to be censured or despised. Neither praise nor money, the two powerful

corruptors of mankind, seemed to have depraved her. I shall be glad to see her again."

In Dublin

In the summer of 1783 Mrs. Siddons appeared in Dublin, where she was very well received, without making herself popular to the admirers of her so-called rival, Mrs. Crawford, who was playing in the same city. Sarah managed, with her customary want of tact, to embroil herself with Digges, the actor, to whom is accredited, or discredited, an oft-quoted criticism which goes to show how easy it is to ridicule a fine performance.

"On Saturday," runs this review, "Mrs. Siddons, about whom all the world has been talking, exposed her beautiful, adamantine, soft and comely person for the first time, in the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley. . . . Several fainted, even before the curtain drew up. . . . The fiddlers in the orchestra blubbered like hungry children crying for their bread and butter; and when the bell rang for music between the acts the tears ran from the bassoon player's eyes in such showers that they choked the finger-stops, and, making a spout of the instrument, poured in such a torrent upon the first fiddler's book; but not seeing the overture was in two sharps, the leader of the band actually played in two flats; but the sobs and sighs of the groaning audience, and the noise of the corks drawn from the smelling-bottles, prevented the mistake

The Lion-Hunters

being discovered. The briny pond in the pit was three feet deep, and the people that were obliged to stand upon the benches were in that position up to their ankles in tears."

Such a critique might well serve as a warning to the superficial dramatic censor, who thinks it a sign of cleverness to write down what is noble. In this instance it only proves that there was a substantial foundation for the remarks about tears and smelling-bottles.

When Mrs. Siddons returned to London to act during succeeding seasons, she continued, save in one painful instance, to be very much in the vogue. Her art and her children—the latter being even dearer to her than the former—kept her so busy that she declined dinners and kindred entertainments as much as possible. There were times, however, when she could not escape from the lion-hunters. Once she went to the house of Miss Monkton, with the understanding that there was to be no crowd there to meet her. She found things pleasant enough until she rose to depart. Then there came repeated thunderings at the front door; guests began to troop in, and the actress, much to her chagrin, had to remain for several hours, to be stared at and

Tragic Manners

interrogated as if she were some wild Indian from America. The drawing-room was so crowded that some of the visitors stood upon chairs that they might catch a look at the prodigy, while others bustled up to her, asked her how she rehearsed, what parts she admired, *et cætera, ad nauseam.* Siddons loved admiration; she worshipped success, and feared rivals; but this close contact with the public bored her most profoundly. She was not a woman who was prone to make new friends. Her manners were commanding rather than genial. There was something tragic in her tones (although she was unconscious of the fact) that did not reassure those who were introduced to the tragedienne. We all recall the story of her purchase of a piece of calico. "Will it wash?" she enquired of the shopman in so thrilling a voice that he started back, frightened by her vehemence. When Thomas Campbell spoke to her of this incident she laughed heartily. "Witness truth," she cried. "I never meant to be tragical."

When Siddons appeared in Edinburgh, where she went not until she had played the Shylock in the way of demanding unexpected financial terms, she was greeted on the first night of her performing with profound silence. Finally someone in the

In Hot Water

audience cried out, "That 's no bad!" A burst of laughter followed this unpremeditated tribute to her talents; then came a whirlwind of applause, and from that time there was nothing but enthusiasm. Home, the author of *Douglas*, sat in a box and wept ostentatiously when she played Lady Randolph; crowds would gather at the theatre early in the afternoon; once there was a riot between persons who were insisting upon getting into the house.

From Edinburgh Mrs. Siddons went to Dublin, and got into hot water. She drew large audiences, but she contrived to make herself very unpopular in certain quarters. It was asserted that she was haughty, save to people of quality; that she was stingy; that she refused to help distressed fellow-players; that she had even boxed the ears of an Irish artist who had humbly desired to paint her portrait. There was more of exaggeration than of truth in these stories, but they showed that 't was only on the stage, and not in real life, that she had the sympathy of the populace. When Siddons moved to Cork one of the critics asked if she had ever "done a kind action?" Another predicted that she would soon be driven from the English stage.

These complaints made their way to Lon-

An Angry Audience

don. Mr. Siddons sent a letter to the newspapers, denying the stories, particularly one to the effect that she had refused to aid a sick actor. But on her appearance in London, in *The Gamester*, with John Philip Kemble, Mrs. Siddons was greeted with hisses. She tried to speak, as her brother led her to the footlights, but the house was in an uproar of disapproval. Then a gentleman arose in the pit, and said: "For Heaven's sake, Madame, do not degrade yourself by an apology!" Finally Kemble carried his sister off the stage, as she fell, fainting, into his arms.

But she was not to be frightened. In a few minutes she returned to the footlights— "only in consideration of her children," as she afterwards explained — and obtained silence. "The stories which have been circulated against me are calumnies," she cried. "When they shall be proved true my aspersers will be justified; but till then my respect for the public leads me to be confident that I shall be protected from unmerited insult." That speech saved the evening. The audience, after considering her a malevolent being, turned her into a heroine. She was soon writing to one of her friends:

"Envy, malice, detraction, all the fiends of

"Victorious Faith"

hell, have compassed me round to destroy me, 'but blessed be God who hath given me the victory.' . . . I have been degraded; I am now again the favourite servant of the public, and I have kept the noiseless tenor of my temper in these extremes; my spirit has been grieved, but my victorious faith upholds me."

One of the most important incidents in the dramatic life of Siddons was her first London performance of Lady Macbeth. She had played the part in the provinces and given to it much thought and study. How weirdly she was impressed by Lady Macbeth is shown by one of her own stories. It was late at night when she first attempted to commit to memory the lines of the character. She was alone in the room, and her sensations, as she reached the assassination scene, changed from painful interest to feelings of actual terror. It seemed as if the whole sombre drama were being enacted before her very eyes. With nerves unstrung, and frightened by the horror of the scene, to which her own loneliness and the lateness of the hour gave an added gloom, she picked up a candlestick, only to rush madly from the room. When she mounted the stairs the rustling of her dress and the flicker of the candle added to the uncanny effect. At last she reached her own apartment, threw the candle-

Lady Macbeth

stick on the table, and jumped into bed without having the courage to remove her dress.

It was no small matter for the Siddons to venture on Lady Macbeth before Londoners who still recalled the celebrated impersonation of Mrs. Pritchard. This was the imposing lady of whom Garrick said that she was "apt to blubber her sorrows," and whose Lady Macbeth, accoutred in hooped petticoat, powdered hair, and other modern appointments, was still regarded as the pattern for posterity. Yet it must have been a melodramatic, unintellectual creation, despite the admiration of the olden theatre-goers, who never tired of recounting the contemptuous anger in her voice and face when Pritchard asked of Macbeth: "Are you a man?" Dr. Johnson must have struck the key-note to her art when he called this tragedienne "mechanical." "Sir, she had never read the tragedy of *Macbeth* through. She had no more thought of the play out of which her part was taken than a shoemaker thinks of the skin out of which the piece of leather of which he is making a pair of shoes is cut." * Incredible as this

* "Is it possible, thought I, that Mrs. Pritchard, the greatest of all the Lady Macbeths, should never have read the play? And I concluded that the Doctor must have been misinformed; but I was afterwards assured by a

Lady Macbeth

statement appears, there is ground for saying that at the height of her success as Lady Macbeth the Pritchard had only a vague idea as to how the play ended.

Mrs. Siddons determined to give a more unconventional Lady Macbeth. She discarded the hooped petticoats of the Pritchard for a flowing dress, adopted a suitable form of wearing the hair in lieu of an eighteenth-century coiffure, and discarded, too, some of the histrionic methods of the dead-and-gone actress. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, hearing, on the night of performance, that she intended to introduce a new piece of "business" in the sleep-walking scene, was so horrified at the dangerous heresy that he rushed up to the dressing-room of the Siddons. Here she was "pondering with fearfulness," prior to stepping upon the stage to play what she styled this "grand, fiendish" part. Sheridan knocked loudly at the door. The Siddons entreated that he would not disturb her at such a "tremendous moment." The manager said that he must be admitted. The actress reiterated, in tragic tones, that she wished to be alone. There

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gentleman, a friend of Mrs. Pritchard's, that he had supped with her one night, after she had acted Lady Macbeth, and that she declared that she had never perused the whole tragedy."—*Mrs. Siddons.*

Frightened Sheridan

was a wordy squabble, as Sheridan rattled away on one side of the door, and the lady declaimed from the other side. Finally Mrs. Siddons capitulated. The manager was allowed to enter.

"But what was my distress and astonishment," related Mrs. Siddons, "when I found that he wanted me, even at this moment of anxiety and terror, to adopt another mode of acting the sleeping-scene. He told me that he had heard with the greatest surprise and concern that I meant to act it without holding the candle in my hand, and when I argued the impracticability of washing out that '*damned spot*' that was certainly implied by both her own [Lady Macbeth's] words, and by those of her gentlewoman, he insisted that if I did put the candle out of my hand it would be thought a presumptous innovation, as Mrs. Pritchard had always retained it in hers."

Mrs. Siddons sternly refused to change her mind as to the candle. She played Lady Macbeth superbly, with a grandeur and an almost masculine passion that delighted the beholders, awe-stricken as they were, and that even distracted attention from the wretched Macbeth. The Thane was "Gentleman" Smith, whose brilliancy as Charles Surface had not fitted him for one of the

Welcome "Obstinacy"

most exacting characters in tragedy. At the end of the performance Sheridan came, quite beaming, to the Siddons, and congratulated her upon her "obstinacy."

As Lady Macbeth was calmly divesting herself of her stage costume, at the end of the performance, when the dressing-room shut her out from the applause of the house, she repeated the line: "Here 's the smell of blood still!" There was so much of nature in her voice and look that her maid cried: "Dear me, ma'am, how very hysterical you are to-night. I protest and vow, ma'am, it was not blood, but rose-pink and water, for I saw the property-man mix it with my own eyes."

We may imagine the withering glance the Siddons gave the poor boy who once tried to serve her with beer while she was on the stage doing the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*. The boy had been sent out by her dresser to get a pot of porter, that the actress might refresh herself when she came off into the wings, but he, misunderstanding his instructions, insisted on presenting the beverage to Lady Macbeth in full view of the laughing audience. Mrs. Siddons darted fiery looks at the little villain, and waved him off with majestic gestures, yet it was only by dint of frantic signals from the

Heavy Rosalind

watchers behind the scenes that he could be made to retire. It was several minutes before Siddons could proceed, so intense was the amusement of the spectators. That she was able to recover her own dignity, and finish the scene effectively, is something that speaks eloquently for the power of her art.

If Mrs. Siddons was a source of thrilling pleasure as Lady Macbeth, she was a source of disappointment in another Shakespearian character. How could the Rosalind of such a woman be anything but heavy, with a tragedy air that sat but ill on the gentle Ganymede? Anne Seward said of Siddons in this part that

"though her smile is as enchanting as her frown is majestic, as her tears are irresistible, yet the playful scintillations of colloquial wit which most strongly mark the character suit not the dignity of the Siddonian form and countenance. Then her dress was injudicious. The scrupulous prudery of decency produced an ambiguous vestment that seemed neither male nor female."

The boy's suit of this Rosalind was evidently a triumph of modest dressmaking that made the judicious grieve and the profane laugh.

Mrs. Siddons's Beatrice appears to have been more satisfactory, but it is impossible that she could have given the necessary

Queen Katherine

sparkle, or lightness of touch, to this charming personage. Her Imogen was a far happier effort, being at once tender and dignified, save where she donned the boy's dress, and looked hopelessly awkward and ashamed. It is difficult to imagine her in any such incongruous garb. Sheridan vowed he would as soon make love to the Archbishop of Canterbury as to imposing Mrs. Siddons. This was not the actress to figure in hose and doublet. The Archbishop himself would have done better.

As Queen Katherine, Siddons added greatly to her glories. There was a womanliness, a pathos,—the pathos of an injured queen,—and a dramatic intensity about this creation that excited even the sympathy of the actors. Thomas Campbell, one of her biographers, tells of the effect of her performance on a player who did the Surveyor in *Henry VIII.* After he had received the Queen's rebuke: "You were the Duke's Surveyor, and lost your office on the complaint o' the tenants," etc., and had come off the stage, a companion noticed that he was perspiring with emotion. "What is the matter with you?" the observant actor asked. "The matter!" cried the Surveyor. "That woman plays as if the thing were in earnest. She looked on me so through and

Other Rôles

through with her black eyes, that I would not for the world meet her on the stage again!"

Of Mrs. Siddons's Juliet, as she gave it in London, it is safe to infer that it was too matured, and not sufficiently endowed with the spirit of youthful romance. In Hermione she was nobly statuesque, and a sight for artists to look upon. Her other Shakespearian characters included Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*, wherein she must have been ghastly, Ophelia, Isabella, Constance, Desdemona, and Volumnia, not to mention Portia, which she learned to play with more spirit than she had done on that night when she first tempted fortune in London. Her Ophelia always exerted a tearful influence on the spectators. And what an impressive performance, with an air of Roman pomp and massiveness, must have been her Volumnia, to the Coriolanus of John Philip Kemble!

"I remember her," says Young, the actor, "coming down the stage in the triumphal entry of her son, Coriolanus, when her dumb show drew plaudits that shook the house. She came alone, marching and beating time to the music; rolling (if that be not too strong a term to describe her motion) from side to side, swelling with the triumph of her son. Such was the

As Volumnia

intoxication of joy which flashed from her eye, and lit up her whole face, that the effect was irresistible. She seemed to me to reap all the glory of that procession to herself. I could not take my eye from her. Coriolanus, banner, and pageant, all went for nothing to me, after she had left her place."

It was Young who had such a curious experience with Mrs. Siddons on the Edinburgh stage. She so electrified him, in a scene wherein the two were acting, by her representation of piercing grief, that he could not say his lines. The pause lasted long enough for the prompter to repeat Young's speech several times. Finally Siddons came up to the mute, and placing the tips of her icy fingers on his shoulders, whispered composedly: "Mr. Young, recollect yourself." This cleared the situation. This strange contrast in the nature of the woman — her passion on the stage and her grave placidity off of it—make her one of the most interesting of all theatrical heroines. The genius that was in her seemed to come to the surface in spite of her coldness. Perhaps, had she not been an actress, she might have become a great sculptor. She studied the latter art successfully, for the statuesque appealed to her very strongly. When she visited the Louvre, she stood for many

minutes before the *Apollo Belvedere*, lost in reverie. Then she said: "What a great idea it gives us of God, to think that he has made a human being capable of fashioning so divine a form!" That sentence was a better sermon than thousands of clergymen have preached.

The years flew on, as Siddons worked energetically. But she lost, in time, much of her old fire; and the once classic form grew portly, as she visited the provinces, or acted at Covent Garden with her brother. When she had accumulated a competence the Tragic Muse decided to retire. She was not overglad to depart from the scene of so much glory. "I feel," she said pathetically, "as if I were mounting the first steps of a ladder conducting me to the other world."

What was intended to be her farewell performance took place on the 29th of June, 1812. She was then nearly fifty-seven years old. *Macbeth* was the play. The crowd in the theatre was enormous and inspiring, and the applause was deafening. During the sleep-walking scene people stood up on the seats, and when it ended they insisted that the play should stop then and there, that they might give a royal adieu to their old friend. The curtain was now lowered for

The First "Farewell"

twenty minutes. As it was rung up once more Mrs. Siddons, who was discovered on the stage, dressed in white, and seated at a table, received a "perfect thunderstorm" of plaudits. After silence was restored she came forward, and recited, with visible signs of emotion, some appropriate verses, which closed with these lines:

"Judges and friends, to whom the magic strain
Of nature's feeling never spoke in vain,
Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,
And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,
May think on her whose lips have poured so long
The charmèd sorrows of your Shakespeare's song;
On her who, parting to return no more,
Is now the mourner she but *seemed* before;
Herself subdued, resigns the melting spell,
And breathes, with swelling heart, her long, her last Farewell."

Unfortunately, this grand scene was not Siddons's "long, her last Farewell." She appeared on several subsequent occasions, the last being at Covent Garden in 1819, when she played Lady Randolph, for the benefit of Charles Kemble. She was but the shadow of her former self, save for her

Enforced Seclusion

corpulency. "Has she not had enough of glory?" asked an unkind critic. She seems never to have been quite happy in her retirement, excepting when she gave readings from Shakespeare. When she was sitting of an afternoon with the poet Rogers the old lady would say to him: "Oh, dear! this is the time I used to be thinking of going to the theatre: first came the pleasure of dressing for my part, and then the pleasure of acting it. But that is all over now." She died in London, on the 31st of May, 1831.

In her own domain Sarah Siddons was one of the greatest players the world has ever seen. "I was an honest actress," she once said, "and at all times, in all things, endeavoured to do my best."

"Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee,
Jest, and youthful Jollity;
Sport, that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter, holding both her sides."

—*L'Allegro.*

DORA JORDAN

Dusty Travellers

IT is a sultry day in July, of 1782, when a party of four, an elderly lady, two young women, and a young man, post into the town of Leeds, England, and alight at an unpretentious inn. They look dusty, tired, and very shabby, despite their pathetic attempts to keep up a show of gentility; there is something about them, too, that suggests the needy disciples of Thespis. When they have rested, and eaten, the elderly lady, who is the mother of the other three travellers, sends word to Mr. Tate Wilkinson, manager of the York Company of players (then filling an engagement in Leeds), that she will feel highly honoured if that person will call upon her at the inn. In the meantime, one of the daughters, whom the mother calls Dora, attracts the attention of the guests of the establishment by the neatness of her graceful figure, and the piquancy of her face.

Dusty Travellers

It must be a rather roguish face, with an archly curved mouth and smiling eyes when at its best, but it seems sad enough now.

Soon Mr. Wilkinson, very fussy and important, bustles into the little room where the family is assembled. When he sees the mother he starts back in surprise. Can this Mrs. Bland be the actress who, as Miss Phillips, played Desdemona to his Othello, nearly twenty-five years ago, at the theatre in Smock Alley, Dublin? Mrs. Bland confesses that she is the ex-Desdemona, says something, no doubt, about not being as young as she once was (as Wilkinson protests that she does herself injustice), and then explains to the manager that her daughter Dora wants to obtain an engagement in his company. Wilkinson looks kindly at Miss Francis — that is the name she uses in the theatre — but sees nothing very striking in her downcast appearance. "Well," he asks her laconically, "what is your line, Miss Francis? Tragedy, comedy, or opera?"

"All!" replies the girl, in a matter-of-fact way.

Tate darts at her one amazed glance. He is not accustomed to having young actresses of nineteen assert that they are equally well adapted for any line of work. But Mrs.

Dora Jordan as "Nell."

From an old print.



Bland rushes to the rescue of her daughter; tells how Dora has fascinated the playgoers of Dublin and Cork, and intimates that Mr. Wilkinson will make a tragic blunder if he refuses to accept so much excellence. The girl looks on appealingly.

The manager makes an excuse to get away for a few minutes, that he may think over the matter. He is disposed to help the mother, the friend of earlier days, but he sees nothing very promising in the triste daughter. Shall he make the stereotyped excuse? Shall he say that his company is now overcrowded, but that at some future time—fifty years hence—he will be only too glad to receive Miss Francis? In the end his heart, rather than his shrewdness, triumphs. He returns to the room, to find Dora in tears. But when he tells her that she can have a trial under his standard, the signs of woe vanish, and Mrs. Bland is charmed. "Give me a taste of your quality," says Wilkinson, hoping that the girl will recite something, either pathetic or amusing. But she shakes her pretty curls in the negative. She wishes, she says, to have her "quality" tested before the public, when she makes her *début* with the company.

The manager now orders up a bottle of

Madeira. Under the warming influence of the wine the whole party soon becomes pleasantly chatty; past troubles are forgotten, and Dora, at the repeated requests of Wilkinson, finally speaks for him a few lines from Calista in *The Fair Penitent*. There seems to be pathetic power in what he hears, and so it is arranged that Miss Francis shall appear in that character on the following Thursday evening. Of one thing the wily manager is certain: the girl has a lovely voice, full of melody, and a wonderful distinctness of articulation. When he praises the new Calista she, looking far brighter and prettier than she did before hope and the Madeira buoyed up her spirits, bows low, and says demurely: "If I can but please my manager I shall be satisfied, and shall I achieve the public favour you will ever find me grateful for the aid you have afforded me in my necessity." Other actresses have made similar sweet speeches to managers whom they have afterwards forgotten.

Before Miss Francis appears on Thursday as Calista, Mrs. Bland desires it to be announced on the bills that her daughter will sing the comic pastoral of *The Greenwood Laddie*, at the conclusion of *The Fair Penitent*. Mr. Wilkinson is surprised. He was so impressed with the serious side of the

young woman's art, as revealed to him by her recital in the inn, that he has forgotten she has any pretensions to comedy. But he announces *The Greenwood Laddie*, as desired, and thinks it will be a mighty incongruous finale for the tragedy. When the time of performance arrives Miss Francis goes through the character of Calista with sufficient effectiveness to please the people of Leeds, who are very attentive to the tragic experiences of the haughty Genoese. It may, or may not, be remembered that Calista is about to marry Altamont, a young nobleman, at the same time that she has had a love affair with the gay Lothario. On the day of the wedding her intrigue with the latter is discovered by Altamont; a duel follows, Lothario falls, and Calista finally stabs herself, as the most graceful way out of the situation. Wilkinson wonders, therefore, how the audience will like to have Calista rise from the dead, rush out before its tears are dried, and burst into a ballad.

But while he is asking himself the question out jumps Miss Francis, with "elastic spring, and a smile that Nature's own cunning hand has moulded," and sings *The Greenwood Laddie* with a humour that fascinates the house. But what is the song itself to the personal charms of Miss Francis? She has

Miss Francis

changed the heroic garb of Calista for a less imposing frock, and a dainty mob-cap from under which her curls fall prettily. In short, she is far more bewitching as Miss Francis than as a tragedy queen, and her contagious laugh banishes all recollection of her previous woe.

Little is the need to introduce this ingenuous young lady to the reader as the renowned, the jocund, Dora Jordan. There is no episode in her life more familiar, or more attractive, than this early meeting with Tate Wilkinson—a manager who ever afterwards took off his hat to her talents, both for acting and for driving a bargain.

The career of the actress previous to this incident has been traced by her devoted friend and biographer, James Boaden. According to Boaden (who is not to be relied upon too implicitly for accuracy of detail), Dorothy, or Dora Bland, was born in the neighbourhood of Waterford, Ireland, in the year 1762. Her mother was one of three daughters of an impoverished Welsh clergyman, a Reverend Mr. Phillips. The scanty purse of this country parson was a mute warning to the three Misses Phillips that they must earn their own living; so they went on the stage, by way of being heterodox. Grace Phillips, the mother of Dora,

acted at the theatre in Smock Alley, Dublin, pleased her audiences, and also fascinated a Mr. Bland. The history of this lover is wrapped in mystery, nor would one care to unravel it very far. Boaden says that he married Miss Phillips, and that the union was afterwards dissolved by his father, on the ground that the son had contracted it as a minor, without parental consent. Another account has it that Bland, far from being a gentleman, was an unromantic stage mechanic. We know, at least, that there was a Bland of some sort who did duty for the husband of the Welsh actress, and that he was the father of Dora.

When she was in her sixteenth year, in 1777, Dora took to the stage, and made her first appearance in Dublin, at the theatre in Crow Street, as Phebe in *As You Like It*. She was billed as Miss Francis. Several seasons later she was playing at the rival theatre in Smock Alley, under the management of Richard Daly, one of the bravest duellists and greatest scoundrels in all Ireland. This theatrical rake was a very handsome fellow, who forced his attentions on all the actresses in his company, and who prided himself, as a picker of quarrels, upon always entering the field of " honour " in a scrupulously elegant costume of pea-green, with

Daly the Duellist

embroidered coat and ruffles. In two years he had fought sixteen duels, and still presented a bold, unscratched face to a wondering world. He was a clever manager, too, and quickly saw that in Miss Francis, who was particularly attractive in such rompish parts as Priscilla Tomboy in *The Romp*, he had a paragon of life and naturalness. She was not one to play superbly the high-bred women of the Lady Townley type, but when it came to humour of a more robust kind, or to a "breeches" part, she seemed inimitable. Her own personality cast an enchanting spell over any congenial character that she assumed, so that the audience was prone to forget the author in admiration for the witcheries of the artiste.

During one season Miss Francis went down to Cork, where she delighted its citizens at the munificent salary of twenty shillings a week. But when the night of her benefit arrived the enthusiasm had slackened so materially, for no apparent reason, that she found half-empty benches and no profits. The expenses were greater than the receipts. A party of young men, an admiring bank clerk at their head, insisted that the poor actress should have another benefit, and they called vociferously for the manager of the local theatre, that they might command him

Fierce Admirers

to carry out their wishes. He refused to come upon the stage. Whereupon, in their wrath, they proceeded to tear up the benches in the pit, and to make a fierce onslaught on the innocent orchestra. When the riot was becoming dangerous an assistant-manager appeared on the scene, to ask the further "pleasure" of the audience. He was told, very peremptorily, that Miss Francis must be allowed a "free" benefit. As no excuse, not even the plea of an unprofitable season, would be taken by the bank clerk's warriors (who were now joined by all the occupants of the benchless pit), the man was forced to give an unwilling consent. When the second benefit took place there was a rousing house to greet the young lady, who thus secured a profit of £40 or more. As soon as she returned to Dublin her salary was raised to £3 a week.

During this period of transition Dora had two romantic adventures. One of them was a proposal of marriage from a Lieutenant of heavy dragoons, who went away broken-hearted, temporarily, when the girl refused his suit. The Lieutenant had no fortune, with small prospects of advancement, and Mrs. Bland, who now looked upon Dora as the future support of the family, cherished no intention that the

Two Romances

weekly wages from the box-office should be sacrificed. So she induced her daughter to rid herself of the poor army officer.

The other love affair was less sad, and, moreover, less respectable. Daly, the manager, sought to detain Miss Francis in Dublin, and when she (not, one fears, through excess of virtue) attempted to have done with him, he tried to imprison her, as a debtor, for money he had advanced to the girl. 'T was a little trick he had when he wished to revenge himself on deserters. Fortunately, the loan was repaid to Mr. Daly by a charitable patron of Dora's, and she was soon acting in the English provinces, accompanied by the mother, brother, and sister whom she never ceased to aid in their necessities.

Thus we bring her to the interview with Tate Wilkinson. After she had played at Leeds, Miss Francis went with the manager's company to York. Here she chose to change her name to Jordan, and to prefix to it a *Mrs.* The matronly title was assumed, it is gravely recorded, to keep "frivolous suitors at bay." The suggestion as to "Jordan" is credited to a remark by Wilkinson: "You have crossed the water, my dear, so I 'll call you Jordan." "And by the memory of man!" he relates, "if she

Fascinating Ways

did n't take my joke in earnest, and call herself Mrs. Jordan ever since!"

During a race week who should come to York but "Gentleman" Smith, the elegant Charles Surface! Smith saw Mrs. Jordan play a serious rôle, and then vary this by appearing in *The Romp* as Priscilla Tomboy. He was so pleased by her naturalness and vivacity in the latter, and so infected by the spirit of her own merriment, that he attended all her performances during his stay at York, and went back to London to whisper enthusiastic things about her into the ears of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Wilkinson grew nervous when Smith spoke eloquently of the actress, for he began to fear that he would soon lose such a treasure. For a time, however, the Jordan remained in his company, as she played in York and other towns, and tried her talents in a variety of parts, among them being Lady Teazle, Lady Racket, Calista, Zara, Jane Shore, and Rachel in *The Fair American*. Were it not that she was too clever an artiste to do anything badly she would have seemed out of her element in tragic rôles. Surely one blessed with so sunny an exterior was at least wasted in sombre paths. We can no more picture her as Jane Shore than we can think of the late, and ever-to-be-

Fair Enemies

regretted, Rosina Vokes as a possible Lady Macbeth.

But on went Dora, sometimes gay, sometimes serious, making many friends, and not a few enemies. Of course the latter were women of the stage, who feared her as a dangerous rival. One of them had a band of male admirers who used to sit at the wings while Mrs. Jordan was acting, and do all they could to annoy or distract her during the performances. Dora determined to be revenged. The audience soon noticed that she came on the stage at night with tears in her eyes, and with every sign of great distress, which she would try, very heroically, to disguise from the spectators. "What is troubling Jordan?" asked her admirers. When they were informed, as she took care that they should be, that unmannerly gallants were endeavouring to worry her, there was tremendous public indignation; the boors were forbidden the wings, and the lady put an end to her tearful pantomime. Another actress who dared to sneer at the Jordan so aroused the ire of Mrs. Bland that this fond mother became almost vituperative. As she watched the rival, during a performance, Mrs. Bland said to Wilkinson, with an affectation of pitying disgust: "I pray, Mr. Wilkinson, that you

A York Goose

will inform me when that fright has done speaking, for *it* is so horrid that I cannot look at it." And the good lady turned her eyes away from beholding such abomination.

These little glimpses of the pettiness of life behind the scenes—for your player is as human as his most prosaic brother or sister—suggest the rivalries that existed in the great company of the immortal Mr. Vincent Crummles. Would that we had possessed a Dickens to describe the pomposity of one of Dora's admirers! This was a Mr. Swan, a York dramatic critic, who glided pleasantly over the troubled waters of existence in the firm belief that what he did *not* know of the stage was hardly worth the learning. "*I* will teach her to act," he cried, when he saw the Jordan. So he would bore the poor actress to death by visiting at her lodgings, and wrapping himself in an old red cloak of Mrs. Bland's, that he might the better expound the intricacies in the character of Zara. Mr. Swan even went to the extreme of adopting Dora as his child, but took care not to leave her a shilling by his will.

In the meantime Mrs. Jordan longed for an engagement at Drury Lane Theatre. "Gentleman" Smith kept reiterating her merits to Mr. Sheridan, and finally, just as the actress was getting much out of humour

Not Sanguine

because she was kept in the provinces, she was offered an engagement in London at £4 a week. She accepted the opening, naturally enough, while her rivals charitably predicted that she would make a failure of it, and would "soon be back on Wilkinson's hands." Mrs. Jordan herself was not very sanguine of success, but she had mapped out a line of work for Drury Lane. What she wanted was to represent "the youthful and the tender" in tragedy and Shakespearian comedy, and to run the whole jolly gamut of romps and hoydens, with an occasional venture in "breeches."

It was in October, 1785, that Mrs. Jordan made her London *début* as the sprightly Peggy in Garrick's cleanly version of Wycherly's indecent comedy of *The Country Wife*. Her performance proved to be such a rare combination of apparent simplicity and engaging femininity that the audience at once took the newcomer into its good graces, and pronounced her a veritable child of nature. From that moment she leaped into the proud position of a town favourite. The Londoners welcomed her as a delightfully irrepressible, almost irresponsible genius, who charmed them, not so much from any premeditation on her part as from the effervescence of her own uncontrollable

Studied Effects

spirits. They forgot, of course, the hidden art which brought into full play the physical attractions — the voice, expressive, irregularly pretty face, and engaging ways — of this consummate actress.

For there were, in reality, two Dora Jordans. One was the whimsical, hoydenish performer, all laughter, or the delineator of graceful sentiment; the other, only seen off the stage, was a shrewd little woman, of kind heart and exquisite sensibility. She studied her effects quite as closely in comedy as Mrs. Siddons studied her own effects in tragedy. An illustration of this truism is to be found in the *Reminiscences* of Macready, who, of all actors, was best calculated to appreciate artistic forethought. He was once required, years after this *début* of the Jordan's, to play Don Felix to her Violante in Mrs. Centlivre's comedy of *The Wonder*.

"I went to work," he says, "with my usual resolution to do my best with my part, but not without misgivings. At rehearsal I remarked, as I watched this charming actress intently through her first scene, how minute and how particular her directions were; nor would she be satisfied, till by repetition she had seen the business executed exactly to her wish. The moving picture, the very life of the scene, was perfect in her mind, and she transferred it in

Studied Effects

all its earnestness to every movement on the stage.

"When the cue for my entrance as Felix was given, it was not without embarrassment that my few first words were spoken; but her good-nature soon relieved me, for when I expressed the love that wrestled with a suspicious temper, in the words, 'True love has many fears, and fear as many eyes as fame; yet sure—I think—they see no fault in thee!' she paused, apparently in a sort of surprise, and with great and grave emphasis said, 'Very well, indeed, sir!' This gave me again my perfect self-possession, and I was able to attend to all her remarks, and treasure up the points in which she gave greater prominence to the text. I have seen many Violantes since, but where was there one who could, like her, excite the bursts of rapture in an audience when she recovered from the deadly agony into which her fears of discovery had thrown her, and prepared herself for her triumph over her jealous lover? The mode in which she taught the Flora to act her part was a lesson to make an actress."

During her first season at Drury Lane Mrs. Jordan played Viola, Imogen, Priscilla Tomboy, Miss Hoyden, Hypolita in *She Would and She Would Not*, the Widow Brady, and other parts. In later seasons her many characters included—to give but

As Viola

a very few instances — Rosalind, Beatrice, Helena in *All 's Well That Ends Well*, Juliet, Ophelia, Sir Harry Wildair, Letitia Hardy in *The Belle's Stratagem*, Lady Teazle, Nell in *The Devil to Pay*, and Cicely Homespun in *The Heir-at-Law*.

As Viola Mrs. Jordan had many admirers, among whom was Sir Joshua Reynolds. Her performance, he said, "combines feeling with sportive effect, and does as much by the music of her melancholy as by the music of her laugh." It was a surprise to the town that the exquisitely delicate nature of Viola could be appreciated by one who was at her best in bustling parts, or in the dress of a fine gentleman. Who shall say that she really was as ideal in *Twelfth Night* as the old playgoers supposed? Yet the most intellectual of them all, Charles Lamb, recalled with pleasure her recital of the lines:

"—She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?"

One thing is certain as to the Viola of the Jordan. Her boy's costume was not of the

No Prude

prudish order—quite the contrary. It may be supposed that, when she came to play Rosalind, she did not adopt the horrible Ganymede's habit worn by Mrs. Siddons. Mrs. Jordan's Rosalind was, indeed, enthusiastically praised for its vivacity—we might almost believe that it was too vivacious—and it easily cast into the shade the Siddons's heavy interpretation of the character. But it must have lacked a certain poetic beauty which we find nowadays in the Rosalind of a Modjeska, or of a Julia Marlowe. Mrs. Jordan herself had no lofty idea of her excellence in the part, for she once said to John Taylor, as she stood dressed for Rosalind: "Don't mention public taste; for if the public had any taste, how could they bear me in the part which I play to-night, and which is far above my habits and pretensions?"

It is hard to gauge Mrs. Jordan when she gets out of her own range, but we can readily understand that her Imogen was ineffective, and that her Beatrice, while full of spirit, lacked good-breeding and distinction. We can accept, too, the contemporary criticism as to her Lady Teazle — a very bright young woman whose recent experiences in town have not altogether banished her rustic simplicity and want of polish. It is when

The Tomboy

the Jordan emerges from this dubious region, and we hear of her as Nell in *The Devil to Pay*, that we stand on firmer ground. Theatre-goers who had seen her as this "lump of nature" never forgot, so long as memory lasted, how, in one of the scenes, she cried, as she looked admiringly on the bed which she was making, "I 've often heard of Heaven, and this is it!"

To Mrs. Jordan's success as the bouncing Priscilla Tomboy we have an amusingly unconscious tribute from the elegant Colonel Welbred, one of Miss Burney's friends. When asked what he thought of the actress he replied, evasively: "I have seen her but in one part."

"Whatever it was, it must have been well done?"

"Yes," answered the Colonel, "and so well that it seemed to be her real character; and I dislike her for that very reason, for it was a character that off the stage or on is equally distasteful to me—a hoyden."

On seeing Priscilla Tomboy Miss Burney began by being profoundly disgusted, but soon lost herself in the lively performance, and ended by pardoning the actress for "her assumed vulgarity."

The appearances of Mrs. Jordan at Drury Lane, where she long held sway in the

Smiling Audiences

domain of comedy, were varied by occasional trips to the provinces, as her fame, and her salary, went on increasing steadily. At Glasgow the fervent citizens presented her with a marvellous gold medal, one side of which bore the arms of the town, including a tree, and the other having engraved upon it a feather, with the following juvenile verse:

"*Bays* from our tree you could not gather,
No *branch* of it deserves that name;
So take it all, call it a *feather*,
And place it in your cap of fame."

After she returned from these little excursions the Jordan would find a warm welcome again at Drury Lane. Here she could draw large audiences on the "off nights," when Siddons was not playing, and here were her benefits always crowded. At one of these benefits, when she essayed Sir Harry Wildair, the house went quite daft over the agreeable raciness of her humour, and the rakish air she presented in the beau's costume. She was "almost as fine, by Jove! as the Woffington," insisted the veterans who were not ashamed to expose their want of youth by acknowledging that they had seen handsome Peg.

But there soon came a time of unpopularity, however transient, for Dora Jordan.

"A Formal Alliance"

She entered, about 1790, into what has been called a "formal alliance" with the seafaring Duke of Clarence, the future William IV. It was not an "alliance" to be excused, nor did the lady's friends in pit and gallery at first regard it with favour. It was thought that she was disposed to neglect the stage, and disappoint her audiences, because of her affection for her very unromantic, uninteresting Duke. So malignant, indeed, grew the rumours that the comedienne addressed a letter of denial to the newspapers.

"I have submitted in silence," she wrote, "to the unprovoked and unmanly abuse which, for some time past, has been directed against me, because it has related to subjects about which the public could not be interested [the public was, of course, intensely interested, and gossiped eternally about the left-handed Duchess]; but to an attack upon my conduct in my profession, and the charge of want of respect and gratitude to the public, I think it my duty to reply. Nothing can be more cruel and unfounded than the imagination that I absented myself from the theatre on Saturday last from any other cause than real inability, from illness, to sustain my part in the entertainment. I have ever been ready and proud to exert myself, to the utmost of my strength, to fulfil my engagements with the theatre, and to manifest my

"A Formal Alliance"

respect for the audience; and no person can be more grateful for the indulgence and applause with which I have been constantly honoured. I would not obtrude upon the public an allusion to anything that does not relate to my profession, in which *alone* I may, without presumption, say I am unaccountable to them; but thus called on, in the present instance, there can be no impropriety in my answering those who have so ungenerously attacked me, that, if they could drive me from that profession, they would take from me the ONLY INCOME I have, or mean to possess, the whole earnings of which, upon the past, and one half for the future, I have already settled upon my children."

This explanation did not, at first, allay the discontent. The omnipotent London public, which cared very little about the immorality of the new "alliance," but a great deal for its own dignity and selfish interests, still harboured the feeling that Mrs. Jordan was trifling with her audiences. A few days after the publication of the letter, upon her appearance as Roxalana in *The Sultan*, the house was in decidedly hostile mood. But the lady, who had as much courage as Sarah Siddons or Kitty Clive, advanced to the footlights, as she said, amid sudden silence:

"Ladies and Gentlemen: Since I have had

Dora's Curtain Lecture

the honour, and the happiness, to strive here to please you, it has been my constant endeavour, by unremitting assiduity, to merit your approbation. I beg leave to assure you, upon my honour, that I have never absented myself one minute from the duties of my profession but from real indisposition."

This little curtain lecture, which, from its stilted character, must have been prepared beforehand, caught the fancy of the house. Applause succeeded the tokens of disapproval, and Roxalana was taken into the good graces of the populace.

Some ten years later Mrs. Jordan faced an audience under even more exciting auspices. It was on the evening of May 15, 1800, that George III. proceeded to Drury Lane, with members of the royal family, to see her in *She Would and She Would Not.* Only that morning, while the King was reviewing the Grenadier Guards in Hyde Park, a gentleman standing within twenty yards of him received a musket-ball in the thigh, during some firing from centre to flank. It was afterwards supposed that the shooting was the result of accident, but on the day of the occurrence there was a rumour that an attempt had been made to assassinate his Majesty. When he arrived at the theatre, therefore, an immense audience was waiting

Exciting Moments

to congratulate him on his providential escape. To the inspiration of *God Save the King*, the house burst into applause, and the sovereign advanced to the front of his box to bow to the multitude. At this exuberant moment a man rose from the front row of the pit, turned towards the box, and deliberately fired a horse-pistol at the unsuspecting King. The slugs grazed the head of his Majesty, and the whole audience was suddenly in an uproar. "The King, on hearing the report of the pistol," says Michael Kelly, who chanced to be on the stage, "retired a pace or two, stopped, and stood firmly for an instant; then came forward to the very front of the box, put his opera-glass to his eye, and looked round the house, without the smallest appearance of alarm or discomposure." * Lord Salisbury, who was standing behind George III., begged him to retire into an adjoining anteroom, as he was fearful that another and more successful shot might be aimed at his master. But the King — who with all his faults was courageous as a lion — said, very calmly: "Sir, you discompose me as well as yourself—I shall not stir one step!"

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* See the *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly;* Jesse's *Life and Reign of King George III.*, etc.

Exciting Moments

As this scene was being enacted in the royal box, Hadfield, the man who had discharged the horse-pistol, was seized by the musicians in the orchestra, and dragged unceremoniously into the music-room under the stage, while the audience kept shouting, "Bring forward the assassin!" and "Bring him on the stage! Show him! Show him!" The Queen, who ascended the staircase just as the attempt on her husband's life was being made, was at first told that the uproar "arose from some boys who had been firing off squibs." When she and her daughters reached the box they learned the true cause of the disturbance, but the calm manner of the King, who seemed only concerned lest she might be unnerved, partially reassured her Majesty. Seeing Kelly on the stage, she beckoned him to her, and asked if the man had been taken into custody. Kelly told her that the fellow had been secured, and then, addressing the audience, he explained that the culprit was now being "examined" by the Duke of York, Mr. Sheridan, and Sir William Addington. "But," he added, "with the immense crowds about the doors, and under the stage, he may possibly escape in the confusion should you insist on his being brought forward." This appeal restored order, and

Patriotism Galore

God Save the King was now sung, accompanied by tumultuous applause and the waving of hats and kerchiefs.

"During the whole of the play, the Queen and Princesses were absorbed in tears; — it was a sight never to be forgotten by those present." When *She Would and She Would Not* had come to an end, after a perfunctory performance in which even the Hypolita of Mrs. Jordan failed to attract the customary attention, *God Save the King* was again demanded. While the company sang it Kelly received from the ready-witted Sheridan a paper containing some verses which the adroit manager had written on the spur of the moment. It was handed to the actor by Mrs. Jordan, with the request that he should sing the lines. So Kelly, with an appropriate quaver in his voice, which may or may not have been the result of real emotion, warbled

"From every latent foe,
From the assassin's blow,
God save the King.
O'er him Thine arm extend,
For Britain's sake, defend
Our father, prince, and friend,
God save the King."

This addition to the national anthem was

Drury Lane Burned

three times repeated, to the "rapturous approbation" of the audience. Then his Majesty, who had acted his own difficult part like a brave gentleman, left the theatre amid the cheers of the spectators. Hadfield, who was found to be insane, was tried for high treason and ordered to be imprisoned in Bedlam for the rest of his days.

There was to be one more exciting episode for Mrs. Jordan in connection with Drury Lane, in the destruction of the theatre on a night in February, 1809. On that very evening the actors of the house were dining together in Lincoln's Inn Fields, as the guests of Richard Wilson. All was careless merriment — that sort of merriment which furnishes such delightful relaxation to the overwrought nerves and brain of the hard-working player. Mr. Wilson had just proposed "Prosperity and Success to Drury Lane Theatre," and the actors were drinking to the toast, when a daughter of the host rushed into the room, with the cry: "Drury Lane is in flames!" The diners rushed into the street, to find Lincoln's Inn Fields made as bright as day by the fire. The theatre was completely destroyed, and Michael Kelly, who watched it as it burned, had the "poignant grief" of knowing that the

Drury Lane Burned

scores of all the operas which he had composed for Drury Lane, representing the labour of years, were then curling up into masses of blackened paper. Great were the losses entailed on many persons, from Sheridan down, and Mrs. Jordan had to mourn the loss of some elaborate costumes. When news of the fire reached the House of Commons, whose session Sheridan was attending, two of the members politely moved that an adjournment be taken, out of respect to the manager. But Richard Brinsley, behaving like an ancient Roman, declared that "public duty ought to precede all private interest," and refused to sanction the idea of suspending the debate.

Sheridan did, indeed, act like a stoic in his misfortune. The next day, at a dinner which he gave to his principal actors, to make plans for the continuance of the performances until Drury Lane could be rebuilt, he asked that efforts be made to keep the company intact.

"I am aware," he said, "that many of the principal performers may get profitable engagements at the different provincial theatres, but what then would become of the inferior ones, some of whom have large families? Heaven forbid that they should be deserted. Let us make a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull to-

gether; and, above all, make the general good our sole consideration."

Tired of Fame

But the Drury Lane fire marked, for Dora Jordan, the beginning of the end. She was approaching her fifth decade, a dangerous time for the woman who impersonates irrepressible youth, and it was becoming difficult to keep up the juvenile illusion. This was particularly the case when she figured in "breeches" parts, and displayed a growing plumpness of limb that was more healthy than alluring. Furthermore, the lady was getting tired of the stage, and took far more interest in the care of her numerous children, ten of whom, bearing the surname of Fitzclarence, had his Royal Highness of Clarence for their father. Writing to a friend, only a few weeks after the destruction of Drury Lane, she said: "I am quite tired of the profession. I have lost those great excitements, *Vanity* and *Emulation*. The first has been amply gratified; and the last I see no occasion for; but still, without these, it is a mere money-getting drudgery." She had earned much from her profession, and it was now her great ambition to make suitable provision for those of her children who had no claim on the generosity or parental instinct of the Duke. Towards the

A Great Blow

end of her life the Jordan's appearances on the stage were fitful. She played for a time at Covent Garden, and her last performances of all took place at Margate in the midsummer of 1815.

But a great blow had fallen upon her in 1811, while she was acting at Cheltenham. A few hours before she was to perform Nell, for the benefit of the local manager, she received a note from the Duke, who intimated his royal desire that their union of more than twenty years should come to an official conclusion. The poor woman was distracted, for she loved this uninviting son of George III., and had come to regard him in the light of a morganatic husband. Perhaps the moral, or immoral, phase of the connection had never occurred to her, inasmuch as she looked with too lenient an eye upon departures from the path of matrimonial regularity. When she reached the theatre she was in a woful frame of mind, despairing, and weak from fainting fits. She struggled on, however, with the part of Nell until she reached the passage where Jobson, one of the characters in *The Devil to Pay*, has to accuse a conjurer of making her "laughing drunk." Here Mrs. Jordan tried to laugh, but even her consummate art could not hide the grief within her bruised

heart, and she burst into a flood of tears. But the man who played Jobson—he was a gentleman if ever one existed — took in the situation with a tact which would have done justice to a woman. "Why, Nell," he cried, quickly changing his lines, "the conjurer has not only made thee drunk—he has made thee crying drunk." The audience thought the tears a part of the farce, and Nell contrived to finish her performance.

"Crying Drunk"

It would be idle to discuss the causes of the separation between the Duke and the actress. He made her an allowance of £4400 a year for the maintenance of herself, her daughters, and her earlier family, and then went his way, to outlive his friend and to become a virtuous King of Great Britain and Ireland.

But more troubles were in store for the disowned woman. It seems like grim retribution for her youthful follies that one of her children, Miss Jordan, should have been the indirect cause of her sad downfall. This Miss Jordan married a Mr. Alsop, and to relieve his necessities Mrs. Jordan made herself responsible for certain bonds and promissory notes. Whatever the inward history of the transaction may be, it is certain that the actress found herself in debt for a considerable sum, through no fault of her

The Exile

own.* She soon fell into a strange, and, probably, a foolish state of alarm, as dreadful visions of arrest and a debtor's prison haunted her, so that she suddenly departed for France, accompanied by a lady who had been the governess to her daughters (August, 1815). She was by no means penniless, although far from being rich, and she hoped that friends and relations at home would soon arrange things with her creditors, that she might return to her beloved England and to her children. But the arrangements never were made.

Mrs. Jordan, after going to Boulogne-sur-Mer, and then to Versailles, with the secrecy of a state conspirator, finally established herself at St. Cloud, under the name of Mrs. Johnson. Here, in a cold, gloomy house, surrounded by a garden overgrown with weeds and containing two melancholy cypress trees, the unfortunate woman would remain for hours, "sighing upon the sofa." Her once attractive complexion was yellow with jaundice; her jaunty air had vanished. There was nothing about her to suggest the comic darling of London except a gorgeous diamond ring which sparkled on one of her

* Mrs. Alsop, the daughter of Mrs. Jordan, went on the stage, but she does not appear to have shone thereon. She died, under unhappy circumstances, in America.

fingers. Yet this was the charmer of whom Hazlitt afterwards wrote that "her smile had the effect of sunshine, and her laugh did one good to hear; her voice was eloquence itself; it seemed as if her heart was always at her mouth."

All Tragedy

At last there came news to England that Mrs. Jordan had died on the 3rd of July, 1816. On that day, as the story went, she had eagerly requested that the mail be sent for, as she was expecting letters from home. She was frightfully agitated as she rested on the sofa in her shabby room, waiting for the return of the messenger. When she was told that no letters had arrived, she started up, stood for a second motionless, with a vacant stare on her wizened face, held out her hand, and then sank back upon the sofa. She cried bitterly for a few minutes, drifted into unconsciousness, and so died. Her life had been a comedy, but the very end of it — the afterpiece — was tragedy.

Thus, weeping, it was said, passed away the woman who had ruled her subjects by the melody of her laugh. Yet there soon came another story from France, hinting that she was not dead; and it was asserted that her daughter, Mrs. Alsop, had seen her after the date of the supposed decease at St. Cloud. Boaden tells us that he thought he

Strange Contrasts

saw Mrs. Jordan in Piccadilly about this time, or a little later, and that when he stared at her she dropped a long white veil over her face, and disappeared. There is surely some mystery about the death of the actress, but we know that she was buried at St. Cloud, and that in after years a tombstone, bearing a Latin epitaph, was placed over her grave. Altogether, it was a curious, pathetically romantic exit for Dora Jordan. Tears, a dilapidated house, an assumed name, the fear of arrest, and then the honours of a few cubic feet of ground in a French cemetery, and a choice classic epitaph! We wonder if the strangeness of that contrast ever appealed to the woolly intellect of his Majesty, King William IV.

" Farewell to the nymph of my heart!
Farewell to the cottage and vine!
From *these*, with a tear, I depart,
Where pleasure so often was mine.

" Remembrance shall dwell on her smile,
And dwell on her lute and her song;
That sweetly my hours to beguile,
Oft echoed the valleys along.

" Once more the fair scene let me view,
The grotto, the brook, and the grove.
Dear valleys, for ever adieu!
Adieu to the DAUGHTER of LOVE."

—*Elegy on Mrs. Robinson,*
by Peter Pindar.

"PERDITA" ROBINSON

A Little Dreamer

DURING a tempestuous night of November, 1758, there came into the world, in the ancient city of Bristol, a mite of a girl who was destined to play Perdita of the *Winter's Tale*, both on and off the stage, and to have at her feet the real as well as the mimic son of a king. This newcomer was Mary Darby, the Mrs. Robinson of the future. As a child Mary, who was of gentle birth, studied under various masters, showed a tendency towards sentiment of a melancholy kind, and loved to sing ditties of a sad nature. The house of her parents was near the grand old minster of Bristol; and the girl would sit listening in dreamy fashion, as the chanting of the choristers and the pealing of the organ could be heard in her little nursery.

"I can at this moment recall to memory," she relates in her *Memoirs*, "the sensations I

A Little Dreamer

then experienced—the tones that seemed to thrill through my heart, the longings which I felt to unite my feeble voice to the full anthems, and the awful though sublime impression which the church service never failed to make upon my feelings. While my brothers were playing on the green before the minster, the servant who attended us has often, by my earnest entreaties, suffered me to remain beneath the great eagle which stood in the centre of the aisle to support the book from which the clergyman read the lessons of the day; and nothing could keep me away, even in the coldest seasons, but the stern looks of an old man, whom I named 'Black John' from the colour of his beard and complexion, and whose occupations within the sacred precincts were those of a bell-ringer and sexton."

When Mary first began to read, her chief delight was to decipher inscriptions on tombstones, or to recite poems that rejoiced in unhappy endings. There seemed to be a morbid strain in the child, which a course at the boarding-school kept by Hannah More and her sisters helped materially to dispel. But there were soon to come real troubles in exchange for the sorrows of imaginary heroes and heroines.

Captain Darby, Mary's father, was one of those visionary men who, in their unsuccessful efforts to startle the world, manage to

"Perdita" Robinson.

From a painting by Englehart.



make everyone around them intensely miserable. It was suggested to him that he should use his ample fortune to establish a whale fishery along the coast of Labrador, and, incidentally, to civilise the Esquimaux Indians. During two years this wildly eccentric scheme occupied his thoughts. It took, in fact, such fatal possession of the Captain, that no pleading or arguments from his wife could turn him from the picture, which he drew in his fantastic mind, of fame and wealth beyond computation. "The potent witchery possessed his brain, and all the persuasive powers of reason shrank before its magic."

Captain Darby, having been encouraged in his madcap venture by some of the weightiest men in London (who hardly went to the extent of risking in it their own fortunes), now deliberately left his wife and family, and sailed away to America. In two years, as he expected, he would return to England, as a conquering financier and philanthropist. But the fishery business, and the proposed civilisation of Indians who had no desire to become European, ended in tragedy. The Indians rose in a body, burned the Captain's settlement, and killed many of his people; he found that he had been trifled with by some of his supposed patrons; he lost his

Grim Reality

fortune, and finally, to cap the climax of his degradation, he gave a bill of sale for his property in Bristol, by authority of which the family was obliged to leave its home.

From that moment poverty and vexation followed the footsteps of the Darbys. The Captain returned from America, only to separate from his devoted wife; and it became a struggle to have Mary properly educated. She did receive adequate instruction, however, and grew into a lovely girl of fifteen, dark of skin, with large, haunting eyes, and attractive features of a thoughtful, almost sad expression. Poor child! She had already seen something of the troubles of life.

It so happened that the dancing-master at Oxford House, Marylebone, where Mary was receiving the "finishing" touches to her education, was Mr. Hussey, the ballet-master of Covent Garden Theatre. He noticed the prettiness of his pupil, as he discussed with the governess of the establishment the possibility of Miss Darby adopting the stage as a profession. Mrs. Darby was in more uncomfortable circumstances than ever, if that were possible: it was necessary that Mary should do something to support herself — and, in short, after many sighs as to the "dangers and perils" of the histri-

Presented to Garrick

onic career, the mother listened to the suggestion that the girl should consult "some master of the art" as to her "capability of becoming an ornament to the theatre."

Mary was first introduced to Thomas Hull, deputy manager of Covent Garden, who was delighted when she recited for him some lines from *Jane Shore*. Then she had the honour of a presentation to David Garrick. "Roscius" was charmed with the girlish beauty of the novice—Davy, faithful husband though he was, never forgot a pretty face — and insisted that she should make her *début* at Drury Lane, on a night when he was to play. But what part could so young a creature take? After some hesitation he decided that she should play Cordelia to his own Lear. It was a selection which spoke more for the talents of Miss Darby than it did for the prudence of Garrick.

"I now," says that lady, "found myself an object of attention whenever I appeared at the theatre. I had been too often in public not to be observed, and it was buzzed about that I was the juvenile pupil of Garrick — the promised Cordelia. My person improved daily; yet a sort of dignified air, which from a child I had acquired, effectually shielded me from the attacks of impertinence or curiosity. Garrick

Mr. Robinson

was delighted with everything I did. He would sometimes dance a minuet with me, sometimes request me to sing the favourite ballads of the day; but the circumstance which most pleased him was my tone of voice, which he frequently told me resembled that of his favourite [Susannah] Cibber."

This delightful apprenticeship, in which Miss Darby was to begin at the top of the ladder of fame, rather than at the bottom, was interrupted by a romance. In short, the girl met her matrimonial fate, and a poor fate it was, in the person of a Mr. Robinson, a gentleman who possessed, in lieu of a fortune, that worst of endowments, known as "expectations." While the rehearsals at Drury Lane were in progress, the Cordelia was taken ill with smallpox, and so constant was this handsome young man in his attentions to the Darby family, at this unpleasant juncture, that he won the support of the mother in his suit for the hand of the daughter. The latter had set her childish heart on a rascally rake of an army officer, but she was at length prevailed upon to marry Mr. Robinson, and to abandon all thought of the stage.

It was a wretched experiment. The girl, who had hardly finished playing with her

Mr. Robinson

dolls, was too young to realise the important step she had taken, while the husband was too worthless to make her a fit companion. For a time the two led a gay, fashionable life, she the cynosure of all eyes, as she moved, in her dark beauty, through Vauxhall Gardens, and he soon beginning to neglect his wife, and to steer his financial bark straight towards the ocean of debt and misery. Finally the domestic shipwreck came, with the ruin and arrest of Mr. Robinson. Detainers were lodged against him to the amount of £1200, chiefly at the instance of the professional money-lenders. There was the usual sequel, for he went to prison for some months. During that trying time, Mrs. Robinson, who now had a daughter to care for, behaved like a heroine. She deliberately took up her abode with the captive, attended to all the work of their peculiar household, even scoured the stairs, and tried to make some money by her pen, in the writing of poems and stories. The only way in which the reprobate rewarded her was to show very plainly that his old love had quite vanished. It is a painful, disgraceful story as the unfortunate wife tells it.

In a few months Mr. Robinson was liberated, and husband and wife rejoined their

Wanted—Money

fashionable acquaintances. One of the latter said, nonchalantly, to Mrs. Robinson that "notwithstanding all that had passed, she was handsomer than ever." He was a dissolute nobleman who had before persecuted her with his attentions. She gave him a scornful look to show that her pride had not gone the way of her fortunes.

The vital question with the Robinsons was now one of ways and means. The husband was by profession a lawyer, but he had hardly completed his articles of clerkship; his father refused to aid him, and there was nothing before him but the prospect of more debts and another visit to prison. It was at this moment of anxiety that Mrs. Robinson bethought her of adopting the theatrical career which had been so quickly extinguished, at its very outset, by her unhappy marriage. One morning she was thrown into pleasurable confusion by a visit from no less celebrated a gentleman than Richard Brinsley Sheridan. She was a true daughter of Eve, in that she loved to be well dressed, and it so chanced that the manager of Drury Lane caught her in a gown which she considered quite unconventional. "I was overwhelmed," she says naïvely. When she had recovered, Mr. Sheridan entreated her to recite some passages from Shakespeare. At

The New Juliet

this she became "alarmed and timid," but the "bewitchingly attractive" manner of the manager, who knew well how to display the graces of life, so reassured the hostess that she gave the desired selections. He was lavish in the praise of her talents, which were certainly pronounced, and it was not long before she had arranged to appear at Drury Lane. Garrick, who had already retired from the stage, promised to be her tutor.

"Roscius" was as good as his word. When Mrs. Robinson went to the green-room of the theatre, to recite the principal scenes of Juliet, he insisted that this must be the character for her *début*. At the rehearsals which followed the great man frequently took the part of Romeo, and worked with such energy, on occasion, as to become completely exhausted. What a scene it must have been to any veteran spectator who recalled the days when Garrick, in his very prime, played the lover to the fascinating Juliet of George Anne Bellamy, in a vain attempt to rival the ardent performance of Spranger Bary!

Drury Lane was crowded on the night fixed for the appearance of Juliet (December 10, 1776). The men and women of quality overflowed the boxes; critics thronged the

Great Expectations

greenroom ; Garrick sat, expectantly, in the orchestra. The masculine members of the audience were impatient to see a young woman whose beauty had been so extolled by Mr. Sheridan (who was a past grand master in the noble art of preliminary "puffing"), while the ladies were no less impatient to see the wonderful dresses which, it was rumoured, she had prepared for the *début*. Indeed Mrs. Robinson, who nourished a shrewd idea of the value of stage costume, had made for herself two gowns which were to fill with envy the hearts of all the women who looked upon them from the front of the house.

In the excitement of the moment the new "star" almost forgot these elaborate reenforcements.

"When I approached the side wing," she writes, "my heart throbbed convulsively ; I then began to fear that my resolution would fail, and I leaned upon the Nurse's arm, almost fainting. Mr. Sheridan and several other friends encouraged me to proceed ; and at length, with trembling limbs and fearful apprehension, I approached the audience. The thundering applause that greeted me nearly overpowered all my faculties. I stood mute and bending with alarm, which did not subside till I had feebly articulated the few sentences of

the first short scene, during the whole of which I had never once ventured to look at the audience.

Generous Applause

"On my return to the greenroom I was again encouraged, as far as my looks were deemed worthy of approbation; for of my powers nothing yet could be known, my fears having, as it were, palsied both my voice and action. The second scene being the masquerade, I had time to collect myself. I never shall forget the sensation which rushed through my bosom when I first looked towards the pit. I beheld a gradual ascent of heads. All eyes were fixed upon me, and the sensation they conveyed was awfully impressive; but the keen, the penetrating eyes of Mr. Garrick, darting their lustre from the centre of the orchestra, were, beyond all others, the objects most conspicuous.

"As I acquired courage I found the applause augment; and the night was concluded with peals of clamorous approbation. I was complimented on all sides; but the praise of one object, whom most I wished to please, was flattering even to the extent of human vanity. I then experienced, for the first time in my life, a gratification which language could not utter. I heard one of the most fascinating, and the most distinguished geniuses of the age, honour me with partial approbation."

Mrs. Robinson had won a triumph. No one thought of her Romeo, William Brereton; no one thought of her real husband,

Frightened Amanda

Mr. Robinson, who was right glad at her success, and proceeded to live off her salary. The Juliet was the one theme of conversation that night, while Garrick was vastly pleased that she had justified his own artistic judgment.

During this season Mrs. Robinson's repertoire included Statira, in *The Rival Queens*, Ophelia, Lady Anne, and Lady Macbeth. The last-named character must have proved far too heavy for her art, but she made a charming impression in other *rôles*, and seems to have shown signs of budding genius in the line of the tender, the sentimental, or the gracefully comic. The fulness of her popularity is indicated by what befell when she played Amanda, in the *Trip to Scarborough*. The play was an adaptation by Sheridan from the *Relapse* of Sir John Vanbrugh. The audience, thinking that it was to see an entirely new comedy, began to hiss on finding out its mistake. Mrs. Yates, who was on the stage with Mrs. Robinson, fled behind the scenes, while Amanda stood as if petrified. Sheridan, who was hovering near one of the wings, signalled or whispered to Mrs. Robinson not to retire. Just as the storm seemed to be increasing the Duke of Cumberland leaned out from a box, and cried to the actress: "Take courage! It is



"PERDITA" ROBINSON AS "AMANDA."

FROM A DRAWING BY I. ROBERTS.

A Gay Life

not you, but the play, they hiss." She bowed to the Duke, the house burst into a thunder of applause to endorse this sentiment of royalty, and the play was suffered to proceed.

Four seasons did Mrs. Robinson play at Drury Lane, flitting from tragedy to comedy, and making a particularly attractive figure as Viola and Rosalind. It was a gay life she led off the stage, filled with admirers and temptations, and with no one but a cad of a husband to exert over her any pretence of authority. But he went on gambling and plunging into debt, while she drove a stylish pair of horses, held morning *levées* which were crowded by people of rank, and dressed bewitchingly enough to suit the most expensive mantua-maker. She could hardly find the time to study her characters amid the whirl of dissipation.

Slowly but inevitably this promising actress was hurrying towards disaster—that unsuspected catastrophe which begins with the roses of unhallowed romance, and ends with the rank weeds of folly and neglect. In December of 1779 Garrick's adaptation of the *Winter's Tale* was produced at Drury Lane by command of King George and Queen Charlotte, who were fairly constant playgoers. On the night of performance,

Enter Florizel

when Mrs. Robinson, looking dazzlingly pretty, swept into the greenroom all dressed for Perdita, "Gentleman" Smith, who was to play Leontes, exclaimed merrily: "By Jove! Mrs. Robinson, you will make a conquest of the Prince; for to-night you look handsomer than ever!" It was the Prince of Wales, then a dashing youth of between seventeen and eighteen, of whom Smith spoke, and who was at that minute sitting in the royal box.

We are all familiar with the empty, selfish George IV., as the unadmiring Thackeray has pictured him to posterity in words that seem bitterly true and contemptuously eloquent. But on this evening of evenings the future King was regarded as a veritable Prince Charming, endowed with all the virtues under heaven. He had not yet had time to develop those traits which afterwards made of his title, "The First Gentleman of Europe," a sneering byword for the moralist. Thus, when he gazed ardently at the Perdita, and riveted his eyes upon her whenever she was on the stage, the lady was thrown into a state of welcome bewilderment. Everyone noticed the rapture of his Royal Highness. Just as the final curtain was falling he made Perdita a romantic bow, as she blushed her gratitude.

Enter Florizel

On returning home to entertain a supper party, Mrs. Robinson was toasted as a heroine, as the guests rallied her upon the conquest she had made, and discussed with fervour the elegant presence, the grace, and the perfect manners of the Prince.

In a few days the actress received a visit from Lord Malden, afterwards the Earl of Essex. In a condition of seeming embarrassment he tremblingly drew forth from his pocket a small letter, which he handed to the lady with an air of profound mystery. It was addressed to "Perdita." Mrs. Robinson, who was no stranger to missives of this kind, took the letter, smiling sarcastically as she did so, and read the few words of "common civility" that it contained. The signature was simply "Florizel"—the name borne by the King's son of the *Winter's Tale*, who loves Perdita.

"Well, my lord, and what does this mean?" asked Mrs. Robinson, half angrily.

"Can you not guess the writer?" said Lord Malden.

"Perhaps yourself, my lord?"

"Upon my honour, no," replied Malden; "I should not have dared so to address you on so short an acquaintance."

She pressed him to tell her who had written the letter. He hesitated, pretended to

Love Letters

be confused, and vowed he was sorry that he had undertaken to deliver it at all.

"I hope," said he, "that I shall not forfeit your good opinion, but ——"

"But what, my lord?"

"I could not refuse—for the letter is from the Prince of Wales."

The lady was astonished, and inclined to be unbelieving. Two days later Lord Malden brought a second letter. "Florizel" was to be at an oratorio concert on an ensuing evening, said my lord, and if she would attend it she would find out the identity of her correspondent. So she went to the oratorio, filled with feminine curiosity, and there, sure enough, seated in a box, was His Royal Highness. That young gentleman made such devoted court to Mrs. Robinson with his eyes that the whole house noticed the pantomime. The next day a newspaper called attention to a passage from Dryden, as being particularly interesting to the Prince, who

"Gazed on the fair
Who caused his care,
And sighed, and looked, and sighed again."

The letters now became more frequent, although Mrs. Robinson virtuously declined

The Paper Heart

to meet His Royal Highness. But she considered, from his writing, that he must be one of the most amiable of men. "There was a beautiful ingenuousness in his language, a warm and enthusiastic adoration, expressed in every letter, which interested and charmed me." Her vanity was flattered: she knew not that this delightful heir-apparent would one day treat her like the cad that he soon learned to become. One day the Prince sent her a miniature of himself, accompanied by a small paper heart which bore two swain-like sentiments—"*Je ne change qu'en mourant*" and "*Unalterable to my Perdita through life.*" It appeared to be the romance of a silly schoolboy.

But there was little of the schoolboy left in the future Defender of the Faith. He persevered in his attentions: there were meetings between the two at Kew, in the presence of the Duke of York (whose title of Bishop of Osnaburg seems curiously satiric) and Lord Malden. In the end, as history gravely records, Mrs. Robinson accepted the "protection" of the Prince, and basked, for a short period, in the unhealthy light of notoriety.

In May, 1780, the royal favourite retired from Drury Lane, with a heart that was heavy, because she loved art, and had before

Phantom Pleasure

her, were she to persevere in that art, a brilliant prospect. Upon the last night of her appearance, when she played Sir Harry Revel (in the comedy of the *Miniature Picture*) and the Widow Brady, she met the actor Moody in the greenroom, and told him that this was to be her farewell to the theatre. She tried to smile, as she repeated the lines of her song,

> "Oh joy to you all in full measure,
> So wishes and prays Widow Brady!"

The attempt at cheerfulness was a ghastly failure. She burst into tears. The poor woman realised that she was leaving a noble reality, "perhaps to pursue the phantom disappointment," and both her conscience and her judgment turned her into a coward. She got through the performance in mechanical fashion; not even the cheers of the audience could bring her back to the old feeling of pride and independence.

It was a reckless, laughing life while it lasted. The Prince, now released from the bondage of parental apron-strings, began a career of self-indulgence, as he gambled, drank, spent money as if it had been dirt, and generally qualified himself for the vices which he was soon to possess in such abundant perfection. As for "Perdita" Robin-

son, as she was now called, her showy dresses and fine horses were the admiration of society and the scorn of the virtuous.

"To-day she was a *paysanne* with her straw hat tied at the back of her head, looking as if too new to what she passed to know what she looked at. Yesterday she perhaps had been the dressed belle of Hyde Park, trimmed, powdered, patched, painted to the utmost power of rouge and white lead; to-morrow she would be the cravated Amazon of the riding house; but be she what she might, the hats of the fashionable promenaders swept the ground as she passed."

The gaze of the populace followed "Perdita" wherever she went. She frequently had to quit Ranelagh, owing to the impertinent curiosity of people who gathered around her to inspect her beauty, as if she were an animated barber's block. When she entered a shop a crowd would gather outside, to wait until she came out again to her carriage.

It was the fickle "Florizel" who put an end to this notoriety. In the play of Shakespeare the King's son is constant to Perdita; in real life it was quite different. "We must meet no more," he wrote one day to his inamorata. Mrs. Robinson wrote to the Prince, asking for an explanation. No an-

The Prince Tires

swer. Then she set out towards evening, in a small pony-phaeton, accompanied by a nine-year-old postillion, hoping to find His Royal Highness at Windsor. On her arrival at Hounslow a cheerful innkeeper told her that "every carriage which had passed the heath for the last ten nights had been attacked and rifled." But the lady was in such a state of grief, so distracted by this sudden destruction of her foolish paradise, that highwaymen had no terrors. Forward she drove in the phaeton until, as she reached the very middle of the heath, a man rushed out from the darkness to the side of the road. The young postillion spurred on the pony on which he rode, while the ruffian grasped the reins of Mrs. Robinson's horses, and lost his hold as the fair driver whipped onwards. It was an exciting race, but the woman outdistanced the highwayman, and arrived in safety at an inn.

On her arrival at Windsor the Prince, who had once vowed such "unalterable" love, refused to see "Perdita." She returned to London, to find herself the target of newspaper malice, and to find, likewise, that she was deeply involved in debt. She secured, at last, one interview with "Florizel," who was most charming in his manner, kind and cordial. The next day he met Madame in

The Prince Tires

Hyde Park and cut her dead. Another flame had taken her place.

Yet the woman whom he had tempted, only to abandon her afterwards, like the royal blackguard that he was, wrote of him:

"I did then, and ever shall consider his mind as nobly and honourably organised, nor could I teach myself to believe that a heart, the seat of so many virtues, could possibly become inhuman and unjust. I had been taught from my infancy to believe that elevated stations are surrounded by delusive visions, which glitter but to dazzle, like an unsubstantial meteor, and flatter to betray."

At the height of his love for poor "Perdita" the Prince had presented to her a bond for £20,000, which was to be paid to her when he came of age. But when he reached his majority he refused to make over to her this testimony of his "unalterable" love, and would have been quite willing, no doubt, now that he had induced the lady to desert her profession, to leave her penniless. But Charles Fox secured for her an annuity of £500, as a balm to her wounded feelings and as a last memento of the handsome "Florizel." How she must have rued the day, or the night, on which she played the trusting Perdita at Drury Lane Theatre!

Social Laxity

One has no desire to condone the fault of Mary Robinson. But we must not forget that she suffered, from the first, from bad surroundings. At the outset she had a selfish father and a foolish, weak mother; then, in the prime of her rare beauty, when noblemen paid her devoted court, she had no better protector than a husband who was only fit to live in debtors' prisons or sponging-houses. And think of the laxity of the "high" society wherein she moved. King George III. might play the royal prude with all sincerity, detesting vice as he detested the Americans, but a whole regiment of Georges could not have stemmed the tide of London dissipation. The middle and lower classes were neither better nor worse than they had been, or than they now are, but the men of rank were, too often, given over to high play, to drinking, and to worse. It seemed as if, under the swimming, bleary eye of the young Prince of Wales, the joyous times of King Charles II. were to be revived. This George encouraged profligacy and brutal pugilism, and contempt for womanly purity, while the world of fashion called him a paragon of gentility. Remember all that, you who would cast an indignant stone at Mrs. Robinson.

It was quite impossible, once that the ro-

"La Belle Anglaise"

mance was concluded, for Mrs. Robinson to return to the stage. Would not the high-minded British public, which had tolerated her sins while she was smiled upon by princes, become suddenly very moral, now that her prestige had vanished ? The risk of a re-appearance was, at least, far too great. So the ex-actress, armed with some influential letters of introduction, crossed over to Paris for a pleasure trip. Here she could often be seen in a box at the opera, and here the Duke of Orleans fell in love with the stranger, much to her own disgust. Upon her birthday, the Duke gave, in her honour, a magnificent rural *fête* in the beautiful gardens of Mousseau, which ended, at night, with a grand illumination. Coloured lamps, garlanded with wreaths of artificial flowers, displayed the initials of "*La Belle Anglaise,*" as she was now called by the volatile Parisians.

A few days later the Duke brought to Mrs. Robinson an invitation to attend at the Tuileries, to see Marie Antoinette and the stupid Louis XVI. dine in public. What a consultation of French modistes, and what a pretty confusion, thereupon ensued ! One of the best-dressed women of London was determined to show the Queen that the English had some taste, despite a

Marie Antoinette

popular tradition to the contrary. At last, after much deliberation, "*La Belle Anglaise*" hurried off to the palace, attired in a gown of pale green and lilac, with a formidable plume of white feathers upon her well-shaped head. Her cheeks, glowing with the roses of youth, were touched with the rouge which was then considered the finishing grace to a feminine toilette.

When she reached the Tuileries, and had the serene satisfaction of seeing Louis and his lovely consort at their *grand couvert*, the Queen sent the Duke of Orleans to put the Englishwoman in a conspicuous seat among the spectators, so that royalty might gaze the better on the charms of "Perdita." The King was too intent on the pleasures of the table, which he attacked with a vulgarity worthy of a peasant, to notice the new beauty, but Marie Antoinette, who ate nothing, gazed at her in admiration.

"The slender crimson cord, which drew a line of separation between the royal epicures and the gazing plebeians, was at the distance of but a few feet from the table. A small space divided the Queen from Mrs. Robinson, whom the constant observation and loudly whispered encomiums of Her Majesty most oppressively flattered. She appeared to survey, with peculiar attention, a miniature of the Prince of Wales, which Mrs.

Marie Antoinette

Robinson wore on her bosom, and of which, on the ensuing day, she commissioned the Duke of Orleans to request the loan. Perceiving Mrs. Robinson gaze with admiration on her white and polished arms, as she drew on her gloves the Queen again uncovered them, and leaned for a few moments on her hand. The Duke, on returning the picture, gave to the fair owner a purse, netted by the hand of Antoinette, and which she had commissioned him to present from her to '*La Belle Anglaise.*'"

Soon after this incident Mrs. Robinson was back in England. But unkind Fate was to make of her a hopeless cripple. In the year 1784, during a journey undertaken to aid her friend Colonel Tarleton, then in sad financial straits, she slept all night in a chaise with the windows open. The exposure brought on a rheumatic fever, and resulted in a paralysis of the lower limbs. She was now taken to Aix-la-Chapelle. Here she once more held a little court of her own, much as she might have done in the old days. Her beauty, of which illness had not yet deprived her, and the sweetness with which she bore her affliction, won abundant homage. Rural breakfasts, concerts, and balls were given in her honour; dukes and duchesses vied with one another in paying her attention; when she could not sleep,

Literary Aspirations

from the pain, the younger people sat beneath her window and warbled songs to the accompaniment of guitar or mandolin. Perhaps the remedy was worse than the disease, but there could be no denying the compliment.

On her return to England, Mrs. Robinson, who had a facile style, with an enthusiasm for scribbling that sometimes ran away with her judgment, devoted herself to literature. Poems and novels dropped trippingly from her pen, while injudicious flatterers hailed her as a genius. It was predicted, indeed, that these effusions would "deck her tomb with unfading laurels." Few realised that it would be through the story of Perdita, and not through the stories of her imagination, that Mary Robinson would become an interesting figure to posterity.

For improvisation the Robinson had wonderful talent. During a conversation with Richard Burke, the son of Edmund Burke, regarding "the facility with which modern poetry was composed," she invented, on the spur of the moment, her once famous "Lines to Him who will Understand Them."

"Thou art no more my bosom's friend;
Here must the sweet delusion end,
That charmed my senses many a year,

Poor Poetry

Through smiling summers, winters drear.
O Friendship! am I doomed to find
Thou art a phantom of the mind?
A glittering shade, an empty name,
An air-born vision's vap'rish flame?
And yet, the dear deceit so long
Has waked to joy my matin song,
Has bid my tears forget to flow,
Chased every pain, soothed every woe;
That truth, unwelcome to my ear,
Swells the deep sigh, recalls the tear,
Gives to the sense the keenest smart,
Checks the warm pulses of the heart,
Darkens my fate, and steals away
Each gleam of joy through life's sad day.

. . . . . .

"Nor will I cast one thought behind,
On foes relentless, friends unkind:
I feel, I feel their poisoned dart
Pierce the life-nerve within my heart;
'T is mingled with the vital heat
That bids my throbbing pulses beat;
Soon shall that vital heat be o'er,
Those throbbing pulses beat no more!
No — I will breathe the spicy gale;
Plunge the clear stream, new health exhale;
O'er my pale cheek diffuse the rose,
And drink oblivion to my woes."

Mr. Richard Burke was so impressed by this bit of doggerel that he insisted it should

Poor Poetry

be taken down in writing, and published in the *Annual Register*. We need hardly ask the name of the gentleman who was supposed to understand these lines. Suffice it to say that they were warmly praised by the charitable, if not hypercritical, Edmund Burke. The fact is, that Mrs. Robinson prided herself unwisely on her alacrity in composition. When she wrote, in the space of twelve hours, her poem of "*Ainsi Va le Monde*," containing between three and four hundred lines, the circumstance was mentioned as something infinitely to her literary credit.

There is another instance of her readiness, over which the scholars and the blue-stockings gossiped with bated breath. A harmless lunatic, known as "Mad Jemmy," was in the habit of wandering about the neighbourhood in which she lived, and affording cruel sport to a crowd of roughs, who liked nothing better than to stone him. Mrs. Robinson, who was an involuntary witness, from her window, of this brutal persecution, brooded over it to the verge of morbidness. One night, after waking from an uneasy sleep, induced by a dose of laudanum to ease her pain, she called to her daughter to take pen and ink, and write from dictation. The daughter, thinking her mother was de-

Not a Genius

lirious, tried to dissuade her, but the invalid started in to recite a poem called *The Maniac* with such swiftness that the young amanuensis could hardly keep pace with the words. The next morning, after a long, refreshing slumber, Mrs. Robinson had no recollection of this flight of genius. She declared that she had dreamt of "Mad Jemmy," but was greatly surprised when told of the impromptu poem.

As a playwright the sick woman raised a flutter among the theatregoers of London by writing a little farce entitled *Nobody*. The piece, which was a satire on feminine gamblers and card-players, was destined to raise a host of enemies. During the time of its rehearsal at Drury Lane, in November of 1794, "one of the principal performers," presumably Miss Farren, gave up her part, on the ground that the farce was intended "as a ridicule on one of her friends." Another actress received a letter which warned her that "*Nobody* should be damned." On the same day Mrs. Robinson got a "scurrilous, indecent, and ill-disguised scrawl," containing the same cheerful prediction.

When the night of production arrived, the ladies in the audience, who seemed to think that *Nobody* was intended to be a fling at the whole sex, hissed the farce "through their

Not a Genius

fans," and some liveried servants in the gallery, sent to the theatre by their mistresses, joined in the storm of cat-like indignation. For the three nights that *Nobody* had presentation the theatre was a scene of confusion. Then the play was withdrawn: not even the acting of Mrs. Jordan could save it from oblivion. Two years later the author, undeterred by this experience, wrote a sentimental tragedy styled *The Sicilian Lover*. But, alas! No angelic manager would come forward to put it upon the boards.

By this time the one-time heroine of the *Winter's Tale*—the *protégé* of Garrick and of Sheridan—was fast becoming a melancholy wreck, poor, despite her pension, heavy of heart, and worn out. The skin-deep beauty had faded; nothing remained but that species of gentle ingenuousness which had distinguished the woman even at the height of her romantic escapade. One morning, after a night of distressing suffering, Mrs. Robinson was awakened from the welcome sleep into which she had just fallen by the forcible entry into her room of two villainous-looking men. The dying invalid faintly asked the intruders "the occasion of this outrage." She was informed that one of the men was a lawyer and the other his client, and that they had come to demand

her appearance as a witness "in a suit pending against her brother." They refused to leave the room, when desired, and started in to question Mrs. Robinson, and to remind her of the loss of her charms. "Who could believe," asked the client, turning to the lawyer, "that the lady we are now speaking to was once called the *beautiful* Mrs. Robinson?" After a few more remarks of an equally polite nature he threw the subpœna papers on her bed, and quitted the room with his companion, leaving the poor woman in convulsions.

Her physicians now advised a journey to the home of her childhood. The thought of it brought "Perdita" new life, as she pictured the old cathedral, and dreamt of the choral music which had given her such pensive pleasure in the long ago. But where was the money for the trip to be procured? The expenses of her illness exhausted the pension. In her early prosperity she had loaned sums of money to different friends, and she now determined to ask from them, as donations, some portion of what she had given in this way. But the appeal was in vain. To the world at large — to the many who had fawned upon the favourite of the Prince of Wales — Mary Robinson had already ceased to exist.

Soon Forgotten

To one nobleman, her debtor, she wrote:

"My Lord,—Pronounced by my physicians to be in a rapid decline, I trust that your lordship will have the goodness to assist me with a part of the sum for which you are indebted to me. Without your aid I cannot make trial of the Bristol waters, the only remedy that presents to me any hope of preserving my existence. I should be sorry to die at enmity with any person; and you may be assured, my dear lord, that I bear none towards you. It would be useless to ask you to call on me; but if you would do me that honour, I should be happy, very happy, to see you, being,

"My dear lord,

"Yours truly,

"Mary Robinson."*

The noble lord forgot to answer this appeal from a woman who was no longer pretty or admired. Mrs. Robinson never saw Bristol again. For several months she struggled on with her literary work, in her humble home at Englefield Cottage, Surrey. One day she gave her unfinished *Memoirs* to Miss Robinson, with the direction that they should be published after the death of the writer. "I should have continued it up to the pre-

* See the *Memoirs of Mary Robinson*, with the *Continuation by a Friend.*

sent time," she said, "but perhaps it is as well that I have been prevented."

Few Mourners

For two long weeks, during the month of December, 1800, Mrs. Robinson suffered intense pain. On Christmas night she sank into a stupor, and died peacefully the next morning. She was buried, as she had desired, in Old Windsor churchyard, and the funeral was attended "by two literary friends." Royalty and the world of fashion came not to the grave. But there is reason to believe that a certain Prince was reminded of "Perdita" by receiving, from Surrey, a lock of grey hair. Thus ended, not according to Shakespeare, the diverting comedy of the *Winter's Tale*.

"Thou art thy father's daughter; there 's enough——"

—*As You Like It.*



FRANCES ANN KEMBLE

Provoking and Attractive

ONE of the most provoking, and likewise one of the most attractive figures, in modern theatrical annals, is Fanny Kemble. She bristled with the hereditary talent of her family, yet we always feel that she might have accomplished more than she did with her genius, had she been in love with her art. There came the rub. In spite of her dramatic temperament, she had a contempt for her profession. In her chatty *Record of a Girlhood*, which chronicles her earlier successes, she is always lamenting, with the sorrow of a Macready, the unkind fate which sent her upon the stage. In speaking of the rehearsals for her *début* she confesses, with a candour that does more honour to her honesty than to her pride, that though the mere labour of acting was not distasteful,

"Every detail of my future vocation, from the

False Pride

preparations behind the scenes to the representations before the curtain, was more or less repugnant to me. Nor did custom ever render this aversion less; and liking my work so little, and being so devoid of enthusiasm, respect, or love for it, it is wonderful to me that I ever achieved any success in it at all."

This actress never could rid herself of the idea that acting was a derogatory calling. She stigmatised it as a "business" of "incessant excitement and factitious emotion," quite unworthy of man or woman, and even said that, were it not that it brought her in a good income, she would prefer to make shoes for a living.

"The profession I have embraced," she also wrote, "is supposed to stimulate powerfully the imagination. I do not find it so; it appeals to mine in a slight degree compared with other pursuits; it is too definite in its object, and too confined in its scope, to excite my imagination strongly."

She even contended that acting so constrained the creative powers that it seemed "rather like dancing hornpipes in fetters."

Now this was false reasoning and morbid hypercriticism. Perhaps it all came from the fact that Fanny Kemble, achieving

Frances Ann Kemble.

After the painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence.



False Pride

popularity at one sudden bound, with little or no preparation, had not learned to love the stage by virtue of that stern apprenticeship which other members of her family had been forced to serve. Because she never had to struggle to win the favour of Thespis, and because she looked upon the theatre simply as a means of earning money, she failed to cherish a due appreciation of the most human of all the arts. Wondrous it is, indeed, that she achieved what she did. We may ascribe her triumphs to the dramatic blood which coursed through her veins—the blood of a Sarah Siddons, a John Philip Kemble, and a Charles Kemble—rather than to any inclination of her own.

Had it not been for the awkward financial plight of her father, the graceful Charles Kemble, the ideal Mercutio and the prince of Cassios, this very vivacious young lady would never have trod the boards which she despised. With her literary gifts, and her curious combination of emotion and pleasant shrewdness, of vanity and self-knowledge, she would probably have been celebrated simply as a clever writer. But domestic events ordered otherwise.

Charles Kemble was, like some other delightful players, a poor man of business, and an unfortunate manager. We could hardly

Charles Kemble

expect anything else from the debonair artist who could represent to such perfection the reckless Charles Surface or the ardent Romeo. When Kemble was given an interest in Covent Garden Theatre, by his brother John Philip, he was being presented, little as he knew it, with a white elephant. The fortunes of the playhouse were on the wane; he became involved in a chancery suit, as one of its proprietors, and found himself, after many years of hard work, in the unenviable position of a poor man of middle age. It was at this critical juncture that his daughter resolved to aid him, by turning actress.

Fanny, otherwise Frances Ann Kemble, had been born on the 27th of November, 1809, in a house in Oxford Road, London. She was a high-spirited, ungovernable little creature from the first, original, bright, and self-willed. Often was she punished, and as often did she smilingly accept her rebukes. One day, when the child had been particularly trying, she was ushered into the awful presence of her tragic aunt, Mrs. Siddons, to be admonished. Melpomene took Fanny upon her lap, to discuss, in the deep tones which had thrilled so many audiences, the enormity of the juvenile offence. But Fanny was not to be awed. "What beautiful eyes

High Spirits

you have, aunt," she said to the Muse of Tragedy. That lady, not devoid of vanity, laughed pleasantly, as she sat the incorrigible down, without attempting any further correction.

On another occasion Talma called to pay his respects to Charles Kemble. Mr. Kemble was not at home, but Fanny chanced to see the visitor. "Tell your father," said he, "that M. Talma, the great French tragedian, has called." Whereupon Miss Kemble remarked that her father, and her uncle, too, were also great tragedians, and that there was a baby in the nursery who must be a great tragedian, likewise—" for she did nothing but cry."

When Fanny was seven years old she was sent to school at Boulogne, and afterwards to Paris. In one of the schools she displayed her hereditary gifts by acting, with brilliancy, in amateur theatricals. At the age of sixteen she had the smallpox, which injured her fine complexion, though it could not destroy the expressive charm of her face. At eighteen she was a romantic girl who had written a clever but immature drama, and who was imbued with rare intellectual vigour and a love of literature. Before she is nineteen we find her writing to a friend:

"A Fine Fortune"

"I cannot swear I shall never fall in love, but if I do, I will fall out of it again, for I do not think I shall ever so far lose sight of my best interest and happiness as to enter into a relation for which I feel so unfit. Now, if I do not marry, what is to become of me in the event of anything happening to my father? His property is almost all gone; I doubt if we shall ever receive one pound for it. Is it likely that, supposing I were willing to undergo the drudgery of writing for my bread, I could live by my wits, and the produce of my brain; or is such an existence desirable? . . . My father said the other day, 'There is a fine fortune to be made by any young woman, of even decent talent, on the stage now.' A fine fortune is a fine thing; to be sure, there remains a rather material question to settle, that of even 'decent talent.' A passion for all beautiful poetry I am sure you will grant me; and you would, perhaps, be inclined to take my father's and mother's word for my dramatic capacity. I spoke to them earnestly on this subject lately, and they both, with some reluctance, I think, answered me, to my questions, that they thought as far as they could judge (and, unless partiality blinds them entirely, none can be better judges), I might succeed."

No two persons could have been better judges of acting than were Charles Kemble and his wife. The latter had herself been a popular player and, as the daughter of a

The Family Trade

French army officer, had in her that emotional Gallic strain which has made many a fine disciple of the stage. As for Miss Kemble, she feared that she must take to the family trade, as she began to ask herself what qualifications she possessed for the ordeal. Some acquaintance with the theatre, from the front of the house, a face and voice "obedient to her emotions," and a smattering of poetic accomplishments, appeared to be her principal stock. Of systematic training, or of the slightest knowledge of theatrical technique, she could not boast. Her thoughts were, indeed, rather directed towards religion, and she resolved, as a proof of her spiritual condition, to give up all surreptitious reading of Lord Byron, a poet who irresistibly appealed to her excitable nature.

During the year 1829, when Charles Kemble was making a professional visit to Ireland, Mrs. Kemble came home one afternoon, to her London residence, threw herself in a chair, and burst into tears. Fanny, who noticed how depressed her mother had been for some time, imploringly asked the cause of her grief.

"It has come at last," sobbed Mrs. Kemble; "our property [Covent Garden Theatre] is to be sold! I have seen that fine old building all

The Family Trade

covered with placards and bills of sale; the theatre must be closed, and I know not how many poor people will be turned adrift without employment!"

The daughter, who feared that a family crisis was impending, wrote to her father, offering to go out to work as a governess. The next day, however, she discussed with her mother the idea of going upon the stage. Mrs. Kemble suggested that Fanny should learn some part for recitation, so that she might be the better able to test the girl's evident talents. Portia, a character which Fanny had always admired, as that of an ideal woman, was chosen. When she had recited it Mrs. Kemble's only comment was: "There is hardly enough passion in that part to test any tragic power. I wish you would study Juliet for me." So the girl got the lines of Juliet by heart, without entering very deeply into the spirit of that heroine. Mrs. Kemble made no comment upon the result.

At last Charles Kemble returned to London. Instead of consenting to his daughter's proposal to turn governess, he made her stand up before his wife and himself to go through Juliet once more. As she ended, the mother and father said, "Very well,

Darkness Made Bright

very nice, my dear." Then they kissed her tenderly, without expressing any more decided opinion. Fanny, now very nervous, ran out of the room, and had a fit of hysterical tears.

A few days later Charles Kemble took his daughter with him to Covent Garden Theatre. He wished to find out, as he told her, if her voice was strong enough to fill the building. So she walked upon the darkened stage, on which an occasional gleam of daylight fell in a ghostly way, and began to act Juliet. The glitter and the tinsel, which accompany a real performance at night, were absent, yet the novice felt suddenly inspired. There was no Romeo, or no audience, but she acted Juliet, so she tells us, as she never did again. In one of the private boxes, concealed from view, sat a certain critical Major, a friend of her father. When she had finished, he said to Kemble: "Bring her out at once! It will be a great success."

On the 5th of October, 1829, three weeks from the time of this impromptu rehearsal, Miss Kemble made her *début*, as Juliet, at Covent Garden. In that short interim she had to study, if she could, all the requirements that go to make a good actress. It was a meagre apprenticeship. So meagre was it, in fact, that Fanny Kemble after-

Questions of Dress

wards forgave Macready for saying that she did not know the elements of her profession. However, she had her father to coach her in the *minutiæ* of the part, and — what was no less important to the feminine heart — her mother to design appropriate costumes. Perhaps inappropriate costumes would be the better term. For Mrs. Kemble belonged to the old *régime*, which recked not of accuracy in stage dress. She sternly refused to deck out her daughter in the garb of a mediæval Veronese, and chose, instead, something uncompromisingly modern. Not that she had any theoretical objection to what was fitting to the period of the tragedy. She only contended that correct costumes were, too often, hopelessly awkward, and unbecoming to their wearers.

There was an important question to settle during these three weeks of work. Who was to play Romeo ? Charles Kemble had been considered the best of Romeos since the days of Spranger Barry, but he was no longer young, and the thought of acting the lover to his own daughter was not, in itself, very plausible. Audiences are too human to forget the personal relations between players. To see a father making love to one whom we know to be his child is not conducive to theatrical illusion. It was at

Searching for Romeo

first suggested that Henry Kemble, one of Fanny's brothers, three years younger than herself, should play Romeo. But he hated the bare idea of acting, and, furthermore, he looked the three years' difference between himself and his sister. However, he consented to recite the part, in the presence of the family. When he came to the balcony scene, which he evidently burlesqued, there was an explosion of laughter, as Charles Kemble threw down the prompt book in a vain attempt to hide his mirth. Henry, delighted at his own failure, gave vent to his feelings in a series of cock-crows. That ended his Romeo. Finally Abbot, an uninspired actor who was old enough to be Juliet's father, was entrusted with the lover.

On the day arranged for Miss Kemble's first appearance she avoided a rehearsal, and spent her time in a condition of desperate calmness, as she played on the pianoforte, or walked, or read from Blunt's *Scripture Characters*. In her endeavour to soothe her nerves she made it a point to go through her accustomed duties, and was actually heroic enough to become absorbed in Blunt's chapters on Saint Peter and old Jacob.

Late in the afternoon Juliet drove to the theatre, with her mother and "Aunt Dall," the latter's sister. Mrs. Kemble, who was

"Ready for Execution"

to return to the stage this night that she might play Lady Capulet, said cheerfully, as a fading ray of autumn sunlight stole into the carriage, "Heaven smiles on you, my child." But Fanny was in no smiling humour.

After the girl had been decked out for her part, she was placed in a chair in her dressing-room, as if ready for execution. There she sat, with the palms of her hands pressed convulsively together, and tears falling down her rouged cheeks. As often as the paint was thus washed away "Aunt Dall" renewed the colour, with willing hands. Several times did Charles Kemble come to the door with an anxious "How is she?" to which "Aunt Dall" made some soothing reply.

At last the call-boy tapped ominously. "Miss Kemble called for the stage, ma'am," he said. The victim started to her feet, and was led, mournfully, to one of the wings from which she could see her mother, as Lady Capulet, advance upon the stage. The applause that greeted this entrance filled Juliet with terror. She flung herself, almost insensible, into the arms of her aunt, while Mrs. Davenport, the Nurse, and Mr. Keely, the Peter, looked on in sympathy. Charles Kemble, the Mercutio, kept away from his daughter, for he was quite unable

"Rows of Cabbages"

to endure the scene. "Courage, courage, dear child!" murmured Mrs. Davenport. "Never mind 'em, Miss Kemble," urged Keely, in his nervous, comical voice, which Miss Kemble never heard afterwards without "a thrill of anything but comical association." "Never mind 'em," he reiterated; "don't think of 'em [referring to the audience] any more than if they were so many rows of cabbages!"

"Nurse!" called the voice of Mrs. Kemble from the stage. On walked Mrs. Davenport, who, turning back, called, in her turn, for "Juliet!" It was an awful moment for the trembling girl.

"My aunt," she says, "gave me an impulse forward, and I ran straight across the stage, stunned with the tremendous shout that greeted me, my eyes covered with mist, and the green baize flooring of the stage feeling as if it rose up against my feet; but I got hold of my mother, and stood like a terrified creature at bay, confronting the huge theatre, full of gazing human beings. I do not think a word I uttered during this scene could have been audible. In the next, the ball-room, I began to forget myself; and in the following one, the balcony scene, I had done so, and, for aught I knew, I was Juliet, the passion I was uttering sending hot waves of flushes all over my neck and shoulders, while the

An Inspired Juliet

poetry sounded like music to me as I spoke it, with no consciousness of anything before me, utterly transported into the imaginary existence of the play. After this, I did not return into myself till all was over, and amid a tumultuous storm of applause, congratulation, tears, embraces, and a general joyous explosion of unutterable relief at the fortunate termination of my attempt, we went home."

And thus the girl's vocation was decided, and she resolved to devote herself to a profession which she "never liked or honoured," and about the very nature of which she was never able, she says, to come to a decided opinion. That night, when she reached home, the delighted father presented her with a Geneva watch, which she christened "Romeo," and placed under her pillow.

There was no questioning the unmistakable success of this Juliet. The audience was, of course, prepared to welcome her because of her father and mother, but the enthusiasm which it bestowed upon her in the later scenes was the result of honest pleasure, not of mere regard for the Kemble family. There were times, in after days, when Fanny Kemble could act coldly and carelessly when not in the mood, but on this

An Inspired Juliet

night of nights she seemed to be inspired. Her Juliet, as Thomas Talfourd observed, had an unusual depth of tragic tone, while it lacked the girlish graces which Miss O'Neill, the fascinating, used to put into the earlier scenes of the play. These very graces the audacious Miss Kemble repudiated, as being too juvenile, and contented herself, in their place, with a pretty air of youthfulness and *naïveté*. One of her finest effects, showing, as it did, the gradual development of the heroine, was produced in the scene where the Nurse recommends Juliet to marry Paris, and to the exclamation, "Speak'st thou from thy heart?" answers, "And from my soul, too, or else beshrew them both." At that juncture, said Talfourd, the actress raised her head, extended her arm, and with a power that was magical, pronounced "Amen!" "In that attitude, and look, and word, she made us feel that Juliet, so late a nursling, was now left alone in the world,—that the child was gone, and that the heroic woman had begun her part." From this moment until the last tragic scene Juliet held the audience spellbound by virtue of her genius.

As to her personal appearance, it was found that Miss Kemble scarcely reached the middle height, but that her movements

Siddons in Miniature

were graceful and dignified. Her face was full of intelligence, with superb eyes like those of Mrs. Siddons, and a fine forehead, shaded by dark hair. There was, indeed, a striking family resemblance to her aunt, although the niece was without the commanding pose or the impressive, more decided features of the Tragic Muse. To look at Fanny, it was said cleverly, was exactly like looking at Mrs. Siddons through the diminishing end of an opera-glass.

Miss Kemble played Juliet for a hundred and twenty nights, to the great delight of the patrons of Covent Garden, and to the accompaniment of a salary of thirty guineas a week. So much money surprised and pleased this young lady, who was now in a position to set up a carriage and aid her relations. No more trudging on foot through muddy London streets; no more grim economising or wearing of shabby dresses.

These succeeding performances of Juliet were, according to the actress herself—often a stern critic of her own work—very variable and uneven. Sometimes, when the tragedy was ended, Mrs. Kemble would fold the girl in her arms, crying, "Beautiful, my dear!" Quite as often, if not oftener, she would say, pettishly: "My dear, your performance was not fit to be seen! I don't know how you

Uneven Acting

ever contrived to do the part decently." This unevenness in her art was to distinguish it so long as she acted. It was well said of her that she was a born artiste—she was surely not one by training—" yet something too wilful withal." She was spontaneous, and great in situations calling for greatness, but inclined to be careless and listless in mediocre parts, or in scenes where finish, rather than effect, was to be expected. She knew how to fill the stage, and to centre all the lime-light upon herself, but she seldom bothered to give one of those complete performances which had been so characteristic of her uncle, John Philip Kemble. Yet she had more real inspiration than the latter. " She let dull-ness take its course. She suffered the cloud to look like a cloud; but when the moment for passion came, her genius darted forth like a burst of sunlight." Her genius does not, however, appear to have been of the lachrymose order. One admired it, or was dazzled by it, without being harrowed by the grief which some theatregoers love to feel. Tom Moore refused to be touched by her acting. He looked around the house, during her performance of a pathetic scene, to see if any person was in tears. Finally he discovered that one lady held a handkerchief to her face, but it turned out, upon further

Ellen Tree

investigation, that she was merely suffering from a cold. The poet was too severe, in this anecdote, but there is in it a small bit of truth.

Fanny Kemble tells us that the only time she ever acted Juliet to a Romeo who looked the part was—strangely enough—when the lover was taken by a woman. This was the handsome Ellen Tree (Mrs. Charles Kean), whose tall figure and broad shoulders made her, in the estimation of Miss Kemble, a very appropriate Romeo to gaze upon. When Miss Tree came to do Romeo with this young lady she insisted that she must pick up Juliet from her bier (according to Garrick's interpolation in the play), and rush her, in her death trance, straight down to the footlights. But Juliet had no wish to be treated in this athletic way. She was slender, yet by no means a featherweight—"a solid little lady," some one called her,—and she had visions of Tree dropping her supposed corpse upon the stage. The more the maiden protested at rehearsal, the more the lover insisted. Finally, seeing that argument was useless, Miss Kemble said: "If you attempt to lift or carry me down the stage, I will kick and scream till you set me down." That ended the controversy. Ellen Tree knew that her friend was a woman of spirit who

Tragic Belvidera

would not hesitate to be as good as her word.

The second part played by the new favourite, who had already become the spoiled child of London, was Belvidera, in *Venice Preserved.* She had never read the play until she learned the part (which she did in three hours), had never seen it acted, and looked upon Belvidera as nothing more than a lay figure in a tragic attitude. Yet in spite of her dislike for the character, and of her being obliged to run the gamut of comparison therein with Mrs. Siddons, she seems to have pleased the spectators. The moment the crowded audience heard the sound of Belvidera's voice, as she is speaking behind the scenes before her first entrance, there was a sort of tumult, as boxes, pit, and gallery joined in a mighty burst of applause. People well remembered how Siddons, when she came to the fifth act, had uttered, in never-to-be-forgotten tones, the lines where the mad heroine, believing that she is drowning, cries out that the waves are "buzzing and booming round my sinking head." Her niece, wisely enough, made no attempt to imitate the aunt, but she produced a striking impression by rushing from the stage with a terrific energy of action which, it was generally agreed, had never been equalled in

Tragic Belvidera

boldness and picturesqueness. Here can be seen an evidence of the girl's wilful, excitable temperament. She affected to despise Belvidera, yet on one occasion, when she allowed herself to be carried away by the part, she ran screaming from the stage in a sort of frenzy, and would have ended up in the street back of the theatre, had she not been led back to her dressing-room, and to her senses. When she was thrilled by the scene of Belvidera's madness she was no longer the delectable Frances Ann Kemble who looked down upon her profession, and who made it a point never to go in the green-room to talk to her associates. She was, on the contrary, the granddaughter of Roger Kemble, the stroller — the Bohemian with fiery dramatic blood surging rebelliously through her veins, and refusing to be checked by prejudice or conventionality.

From Belvidera Miss Kemble turned to Euphrasia, in *The Grecian Daughter*. In the following season she played, among other characters, Lady Townley, Mrs. Haller, Calista, Juliana, in *The Honeymoon*, Lady Macbeth, and Mrs. Beverley, in *The Gamester*. It was in her acting of Mrs. Beverley that she noticed, more clearly than she had done before, that curious dramatic process by which an artist can *feel* what he is repre-



FRANCES ANN KEMBLE AS "EUPHRASIA."

FROM A DRAWING BY WAGEMAN.

Dual Power

senting, and at the same time keep his faculties on the alert for the realities of his art — for the proper pose, expression, and intonation, for the place where he is to stand, for the manner in which he is to move, etc. It is a double life that the real player leads when he is before an audience. He enters heart and soul into the character, without ever forgetting his own identity. The actor who does forget his identity ceases to be an artist, while, on the other hand, if he can think of nothing but his technique he ceases to be inspired. When Fanny Kemble made her *début* as Juliet she was not so much absorbed in her character as she supposed. Had she completely forgotten herself she would have been incoherent and ineffective. But when she tried to rush out into the street, as the mad Belvidera, she ceased to be the finished performer, and became, for the nonce, an unbalanced, hysterical woman.

"In that last scene of Mrs. Beverley," she says, "while I was half dead with crying in the midst of the real grief, created by an entirely unreal cause, I perceived that my tears were falling in rain all over my silk dress and spoiling it, and I calculated and measured most accurately the space that my father would require to fall in, and moved myself and my train accordingly."

"A Clever Girl"

Here we see the real artiste with a mind for little things as well as for great effects. It is a mistake to believe that genius, in any of its forms, is above detail.

The year 1832, a "red-letter" one for Covent Garden, witnessed the production there of several new plays, including Fanny Kemble's own tragedy of *Francis I.*, and James Sheridan Knowles's drama of *The Hunchback*, in which she created the part of Julia. *Francis I.* proved to be clever and precocious, but nothing more. There were effective situations, but no general interest, and the characters were, for the most part, monotonous in their rank wickedness.

"Much of it," said one of the critics, "is just such dramatic poetry as a girl (a clever girl) of seventeen would write, the language of the poets, not of poetry; and, as was very natural with a Kemble, the language of Shakespeare, full of 'By my fay,' and 'Sith you say,' and 'Wend your way,' and 'Go to, go to!' and 'Marry, this means,' and all the other outward and visible signs of a school exercise. But of the living, breathing language of passion and nature there is little, and there is less of poetry."

But the same critic had far kinder words, and as just ones, for Miss Kemble's acting of Julia in *The Hunchback*.

"Genuine Feeling"

"We followed her throughout with constantly increasing satisfaction, and may truly affirm that a more perfect piece of acting has seldom been witnessed than her earnest and impressive appeal to Master Walter, in the commencement of the fifth act. Genuine feeling took the place of laboured and measured emphasis—the picture was true to nature—it was difficult to imagine that she uttered any words but those which the emergency of the moment called forth, and at the close of her address its truth and beauty were acknowledged by shouts of 'Brava!' from all parts of the house."

Other parts which Fanny Kemble acted prior to her departure for America included Portia, Isabella, in *The Fatal Marriage*, Lady Teazle, Beatrice, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Bianca, in *Fazio*. The part of Beatrice, one of the few characters which she confesses to having enjoyed in the performance, was learned by heart in the short space of an hour. Her memory was remarkable.

At this time Miss Kemble and her father visited the English provinces, Scotland, and Ireland. In Dublin she became so great a favourite that crowds waited at the side entrance of the theatre, to watch for her to come out to her carriage at the end of the play. "Three cheers for Misther Char-les!"

Irish Cheers

cried the populace, on one evening, as Charles Kemble stepped out from the stage door. "Three cheers for Mistress Char-les!" they shouted as "Aunt Dall," whom they mistook for Mrs. Kemble, emerged from the theatre. Then, as the new "star" came out, there were three lusty cheers for "Miss Fanny." "Bedad, she looks well by gaslight!" cried one of her admirers. "Och, and bedad, she looks well by daylight, too!" retorted his companion. On another evening, in Dublin, when Miss Kemble was acting Lady Townley, an amusing thing occurred. In the scene where Lord Townley complains of her late hours, she answers impertinently, "I won't come home till four to-morrow morning!" "Then, Madame," says her husband, "you shall never come home again!" As Lady Townley paused, to express her surprise, and to make the necessary interval for dramatic effect, one of the Irishmen in the gallery, thinking that the fine lady should assert herself, exclaimed in a loud voice: "Now, thin, Fanny!" The illusion of the scene, so intense until that episode, was fairly ruined.

In the summer of 1832 Charles Kemble and his daughter sailed for America, to play there in the principal cities. The father was glad to get away for change of scene for, in

Off to America

spite of the triumphs of his daughter, his own financial affairs were in sad condition, owing to the constant litigation in which he had become involved by his unfortunate interest in the proprietorship of Covent Garden. The daughter regretted leaving England, even if she lacked the customary blind English prejudice against things American, and little realised that she would soon settle down in the New World. It was as Bianca that she made her American *début* at the Park Theatre, New York (September 18th). Her success seemed assured from the first, and both she and her father were everywhere most cordially received.

At this first performance Miss Kemble was obliged to bear with a wretched Fazio, who had been compelled to study his part in a hurry, and who, in consequence, hardly knew three lines of it. He was too frightened to profit by the promptings of the self-possessed Bianca. All he could accomplish was to go down upon his knees, which he did about every four or five minutes. Once he dropped down exactly opposite to the heroine. "There we were," she relates, "looking for all the world like one of those pious conjugal *vis-à-vis* that adorn antique tombs in our cathedrals."

But Fazio could not interfere with Fanny

Generous Criticism

Kemble's effectiveness, or with the pleasure of the audience at her Bianca. Said a New York critic:

"It is exhilarating to behold, in a young country like ours, so true a feeling for all that is most exquisite in art. We doubt if London could give her a welcome more earnest, or applause more enlightened. Her person is *petite*, but our stage is not so large as to make that objectionable. Her action is most easy and elegant, with more of the French than the English manner in it; and perfectly original in our eyes, accustomed as they are to something more staid and homely. They say that Madame Vestris, in England, is distinguished for having built her action upon a similar school; but we are strangers to Vestris, and were she all that her most earnest admirers picture, she could not exceed, even if she could equal, the grace and *deep power* of Fanny Kemble."

The quiet polish of the Kembles was somewhat of a revelation to the New Yorkers. For in the year 1832 American dramatic art, as we are now proud to claim it, did not exist. There were no fixed standards of acting, and it is to be feared, furthermore, that noisiness in comedy, or bombast in tragedy (as exhibited by second-rate Eng-

Not a "Ranter"

lish performers who drifted to the United States), too often passed for the true histrionic spirit. Fanny Kemble feared that the acting of herself and her father might be on too subdued a plane for the new audiences. "Ranting and raving in tragedy, and shrieks of unmeaning laughter in comedy are not exactly our style," she remarked, with a tinge of the supercilious. It was repeated to her, some time afterwards, that a theatregoer had said, on seeing her father in *Venice Preserved:* "Lord bless you; it 's nothing to Cooper's acting. Why, I 've seen the perspiration roll down his face like water when he played Pierre!" But the quietness of the Kembles proved rather refreshing, than otherwise, to the admirers of this perspiring form of art.

It was at the outset of the New York engagement that Charles Kemble was obliged to play Romeo to Fanny Kemble's Juliet. It was a rather rash experiment for a man who was nearing the sixty-year mark to make stage-love to a young woman of twenty-two or twenty-three, and to his own daughter at that, but the audience appears to have borne the ordeal manfully. In his day Kemble, as we have indicated, had been a delightfully languorous Romeo, sighing elegantly to Juliet like twenty furnaces.

Clerical Diplomacy

Probably there was some remnant of youthful fire in his New York performance.

Of her early American experiences, of her visits to different cities, and of the people she met, Miss Kemble gives us bright glimpses in her letters. Nothing, in its way, is better than her story of the fashionable New York clergyman who chanced to meet her while he was dining at her hotel with some English friends. He was charmed, he said, to have the honour of an introduction, as it was, quite unfortunately, the only chance he would have of meeting the actress. His congregation, he explained, was so strait-laced that he dared not call upon the Kembles, or invite them to his house. "This is rather narrow-minded, I think," wrote the young lady, "for this free and enlightened country."

When Fanny Kemble conversed with Washington Irving, whom she profoundly admired because of his own admiration for England, she complained to him that the stage left her little or no leisure for literary study or improvement.

"Well," said Irving, "you are living, you are seeing men and things, you are seeing the world, you are acquiring materials and heaping together observations, and experience, and wisdom, and

Washington Irving

by and by, when with fame you have acquired independence, and retire from these labours, you will begin another and a brighter course with matured powers."

Whereat Miss Kemble felt almost "hopeful."

Not many months later the actress was sitting next to Irving at a dinner-party given in New York. "I hear you are going to be married, and that you are going to settle in this country?" he said, interrogatively. Miss Kemble admitted that she was to marry Pierce Butler, of Philadelphia. The author told her, laughingly, to make up her mind to take things in America as she found them, and not to get into the habit of comparing this country, always to its disadvantage, with Old England. "Above all, whatever you do," he said, "don't become a creaking door!" "A creaking door!" laughed Miss Kemble. "What do you mean?" He told her that a friend of his, a distinguished artist, had married an Englishwoman who had become such a nuisance, by her bigoted complaints of all things American, that she had been christened "The Creaking Door."

Miss Kemble did not become a "creaking door," but she failed to find domestic happiness in her life with Mr. Butler. She left

Domestic Jars

the stage when she was married in the summer of 1834, and expected to devote herself, apparently, to a quiet, unprofessional career. But the years brought sorrow and separation. In February of 1847 she was again on the stage, playing Julia, in *The Hunchback*, at the Theatre Royal, in Manchester, England. Long before the curtain rose the house was crowded from pit to dome. When she entered on the scene there was tremendous excitement. Round after round of applause, and a succession of cheers, made her feel at home, and, perhaps, caused her to forget her disgust for that profession to which she must sadly return. It was noticed that absence from the stage had not marred the music of her voice, and that her actions and attitudes were as picturesque as ever. Her performance justified the eulogium of Julia's creator, James Sheridan Knowles.

"Her Julia," he once wrote, "has outstripped my most sanguine hopes! Can I say more? Yes; the soul of Siddons breathes its inspirations upon us again! The 'Do it' of Julia, in the elocution of the actress, stands beside the 'Hereafter' of Lady Macbeth—that instance of transcending histrionic display, which I never hoped to hear equalled!"

During this Manchester engagement Mrs.

As a Reader

Butler, or Miss Kemble, appeared in such characters as Juliana, Lady Macbeth, Juliet, and Queen Katherine. Later on she played with Macready at the Princess's Theatre, London. But she soon gave up the stage for the more congenial task of a Shakespearian reader. In this agreeable capacity she appeared both in England and America, winning the praise that was her due. The ordinary Shakespearian recital is, too often, monotonous in a dramatic sense, but Fanny Kemble gave to her readings variety of expression as well as a fine elocution.

"Without the adventitious aids of dress and scenery," wrote Adam Badeau, "she is able to bring up the various individuals of the play nearly as vividly as a stageful of performers. You see and hear Othello and Iago, Richard and Lady Anne, Prospero and Ariel. You cannot avoid criticising her as an actress; for she possesses the marvellous faculty of expression in face and form, that is as necessary to an actress as intellect or voice, and contributes as much to success as either. She has also the power, which the very greatest geniuses of the stage possess, not only of enchaining the attention, but compelling an unconscious imitation of her looks in those of her hearers. I have at times caught myself responding to her expression, or copying,

As a Reader

with my own features, the varying emotions depicted on her mobile countenance."

"What glorious readings!" chronicles Longfellow in his *Journal*. "The spiritual Ariel, the stern Prospero, the lover Ferdinand, Miranda the beloved, Stefano, Trinculo, Caliban, each had a voice distinct and separate, as of many actors." Again he writes, under date of February 18, 1857:

"At Miss Kemble's reading of *Macbeth* at Tremont Temple. Just as she was giving the words of Banquo on first seeing the witches —

"'What are these
So withered and so wild in their attire,'

three belated women came trailing down the aisle to a front seat directly in the range of her eye. The effect was indescribably ludicrous."

The last time that Fanny Kemble undertook these readings in America, her manager said to her, during an interview in which the preliminary arrangements for them were being made: "Well, ma'am, I think everything is in quite a nice train. I should say things are in a most favourable state of preparation. We 've a delightful article coming out in the ——." Here he mentioned a popular periodical. "Yes, really, ma'am,

The Gentle "Puff"

I should say first-rate, and I thought, perhaps, we might induce you to be good enough to help us a little with it."

"Bless me," cried Miss Kemble, who had not been initiated into the great American art of "puffing," and who naturally was puzzled, "how can *I* help you?"

"Well, ma'am, with a few personal anecdotes, if you would be so kind."

Miss Kemble refused to contribute to the proposed article which was to extol her own merits. She did not forbid the "puff," but she warned the manager that it must not be too extravagant. "For if you overdo it in the least," she said, "I will write an article myself, on my readings, showing up all their faults, and turning them into ridicule, as I do not believe anyone else either would or could. So puff just as quietly as you can."

The English manager of Miss Kemble's readings complained bitterly to her sister about his client's sensitiveness to self-laudation. "Why, you know, ma'am," he whined, "it 's really dreadful; you know Mrs. Kemble won't even allow us to say in the bills, *these celebrated readings;* and you know, ma'am, it 's really impossible to do with less; indeed it is! Why, ma'am, you know even ——'s Pills are always advertised as *these celebrated Pills.*"

In Old Age

For many years prior to her death Miss Kemble lived, partly in this country, which she had learned to love and appreciate, and partly in England, a life of dignified retirement. She published several autobiographical works, which have become little classics in their reminiscent way, and was, until the last, a woman of independent thought and fine intellectuality. She died in London on the 16th of January, 1893. Would that she had loved the theatre more, that she might have given more of her genius to the public! For it was only her hatred of the stage, as Brander Matthews so well says, that "kept her from holding the first place on it." She herself admitted that she had never added to her natural dramatic resources the labour necessary to produce an ideal performance. She even said that, "coming of a family of *real* artists," she never felt she deserved that honourable name. There she was too modest. Fanny Kemble was an artiste by right of an inherited talent which could not be disguised. Had she re-enforced that talent with application and the enthusiasm of a Kean, or of a Charlotte Cushman, she might have become a second Siddons.

' For wheresoe'er I turn my ravished eyes,
Gay gilded scenes and shining prospects rise,
Poetic fields encompass me around,
And still I seem to tread on classic ground.''

—*Addison.*



RACHEL

A Fairy Tale

ONCE upon a time, as the fairy tales say —and this truthful memoir might almost be a fairy tale in its strange contrasts—there lived a Jewish pedler, Abraham Félix, who used to wander through Germany, and France, and Switzerland, in a constant struggle to sell enough of his wares to put food into the mouths of his growing family. During a visit to the village of Munf, in the last-named country, his wife gave birth to a second daughter (March 24, 1821), who was named Elisa Rachel. Curiously enough, she came into the world in an inn bearing the resplendent title of "The Golden Sun," but there was no prophet in the village to foretell that the newcomer was to become the most brilliant luminary in the dramatic constellation of France. In the year 1821 the birth of this girl meant, and only meant, that energetic *Père* Félix had

The Street Singer

another helpless hostage to fortune who must be fed and clothed.

As the years went on, and Rachel grew into a bright, intelligent child, with wonderful dark eyes that sometimes had in them an almost diabolic gleam, the pedler took up his abode in Lyons. Here he taught Frenchmen how to wrestle with the plethoric German tongue, while all his family assisted in the support of the household. Rachel and Sarah, her elder sister, contributed their share by singing through the streets of Lyons like regular itinerants. It was a hard life, nor did the effect of it ever entirely vanish from the feline character of the future actress. A little of the mud of the streets always clung to the skirts of the classic Phèdre.

From Lyons, Abraham Félix, still little more than a pauper, drifted to Paris, where Sarah and Rachel trod the boulevards to sing for bread. Once the children attracted the attention of Choron, a music-master. He interested himself in them, took them into his school, and was disposed to think Sarah far more promising and talented than her sister. As for Rachel, she must have been a restless, impossible girl, who gave no hint of the greatness she was to achieve.

But her opportunity was surely coming. By degrees the music-master perceived that

Rachel.

From a painting by H. Lehmann.



"Lean and Hungry"

Rachel was more of a reciter than a singer, and he finally secured for her a place in the dramatic class of Pagnon Saint Aulaire. Here the delighted child, who was now thirteen years old, found a new atmosphere. She studied various characters under the direction of Saint Aulaire, showed a curious weakness for comedy parts—curious because there was not an atom of real comedy in her nature—and proved herself to be an apt but excessively independent pupil. Rachel was not an attractive figure then, despite the signs of genius which her instructor began to detect in her elocution, expressions, and gestures. She looked lean and hungry; her voice was rather unpleasant than otherwise, and there was still about her a mixture of pathos and precocious worldliness which one so often sees in children who run the streets of a great city.

One morning, when Rachel was about fifteen, Saint Aulaire entered the office of Jouslin de la Salle, then director of the Théâtre Française, to sound the praises of "a poor Jewish girl" whom he wished this august person to see. Her name, he explained, was Elisa Rachel Félix, and she was "the ideal of tragedy"—the only person, he said, who was capable of recalling the *chefs-d'œuvres* of the tragic authors. The

Mademoiselle Mars

director readily gave audience to one who bore such high-flown credentials, even though he must have felt somewhat skeptical as to the real talents of the treasure. Teachers have a way of exploiting prize pupils to the verge of asinine enthusiasm, and prize pupils have an uncomfortable way of proving a disappointment in after life — like the "head-boy" whom Thackeray was surprised to find, long after his school-days, as a perfect nonentity.

However, when the scrawny, white-faced Mademoiselle Félix recited the lines of Hermione in *Andromaque*, Jouslin was surprised out of his accustomed cynicism by the fire and energy of her manner. The great Mademoiselle Mars, who was present at this trial, folded the girl in her arms and kissed her, while Rachel, at once charmed and abashed by her success, ventured to say that she hoped she was not too short to play queens and heroines. "Mademoiselle Maillet, the great tragic actress, was shorter than this girl," cried Mars; "and besides, it is a good fault — the child will grow." The director of the Comédie seemed to agree with the ex-queen of the French stage, for he offered Mademoiselle Félix an engagement to play children's characters.

But geniuses are privileged to be contra-

Blind Teachers

dictory. Instead of appearing at the Française, the girl entered the Conservatoire. It was a foolish move. One of the professors brutally told her that she never would make an actress, and that she had better return to the streets of Paris. She was not appreciated in this musty, academic environment, where few had the wit to see her talents. Everyone, save Samson, seemed to take pleasure in snubbing her. At last, when some unbearable affront was put upon the girl, all the pride within her rose, and she shook the dust of the Conservatoire from her feet. She had sacrificed a good prospect at the Française to waste her time in a place where the sacred laws of stiffness and stupid conventionality reigned supreme.

But her friend, Saint Aulaire, had not forgotten the pupil for whom he had predicted such great things. He spoke of her to Poirson, of the Gymnase Theatre, and that manager sent word that he would like her to visit him. This she did, and so pleased him by her recital of some classic character, that he proposed to take her at once into his company. When he offered the girl three thousand francs a year for salary, it seemed, in her unluxurious mind, to be a fortune. She accepted the offer only too gladly, and decided, on the advice of the manager, to

A True Peasant

take the stage name of "Mademoiselle Rachel."

It was as a poor peasant girl, who saves the life of her condemned father by pleading with the Empress Josephine, that Rachel made her *début* at the Gymnase in May of 1837. The play was *La Vendéene*. In the trials of the child who finds herself alone in Paris there must have been much to appeal to the personal feeling of the young actress. Her performance of Genevieve was, at least, a foreshadowing of the wonderfully life-like methods and the close study of nature which would afterwards be such a noble feature of her art. She produced tears by the very simplicity of this plain, unattractive heroine, whom she was careful to portray as a true peasant. It was the same fidelity to reality that made Fechter insist that a peasant in one of George Sand's dramas should be played in rough clothes and with a *patois*, instead of with the air of a Parisian *boulevardier*.

But in spite of the artistic success of Rachel and the eloquent predictions of several critics, she longed to get away to the more congenial atmosphere of the Comédie Française. Poirson, the manager, was shrewd enough to see that the Gymnase, or the comedy appropriate to that theatre, would afford his *protégé* but a poor field,

and he strongly advised her to gain an entrance into the Comédie. So she tried to get an engagement there, found that her letter requesting an audience remained unanswered, and finally placed herself under the instruction of Samson. For several months the great man laboured with the girl in the details of her profession, giving her just that finish and knowledge of technique which she had heretofore lacked, and seeing to it that the governess of his own children should teach her history and grammar — two branches in which she was, not unnaturally, lamentably ignorant. He did more than that, for he secured for her an engagement at the Comédie.

Kind Samson

It was on the 12th of June, 1838, that Rachel put a new life into the French classic drama, and showed Parisians the difference between bombast and the finest realism by appearing as Camille in Corneille's tragedy of *Les Horaces*. There is little left of that school of play nowadays, and even in the year 1838 there were influences at work that foretold its gradual decay. But Rachel dragged it back to temporary existence, as if only to show that genius can invest with a passion and depth of its own artificial characters that but reflect the no less artificial bent of their creators.

Praise Worth Winning

At this historic performance of *Les Horaces* there sat, in one of the boxes of the Théâtre Française, the self same Mademoiselle Mars who had so admired the early recitation of the *débutante*. "I can tell you, great things may be expected of this Mademoiselle Rachel," she said to a friend who accompanied her to the box. When Rachel first appeared on the scene it was observed that she had grown taller, that her voice had lost its old harshness, and that, without being robust, she lacked the hungry look of an ill-fed animal. But for the burning eyes, the reflectors of her restless soul, she would have seemed quite a new being.

"She walks the stage well," observed Mars, with a nod and a sigh of satisfaction. "And she listens well!" she cried, turning to M. de Varenne, with an air of triumph. For it was M. de Varenne who had said, just before the rising of the curtain, that he understood there was nothing "*extraordinaire*" about the *débutante*. A little later Mars exclaimed: "Ah! I told you she does not declaim; she *speaks!*" It was evident that Rachel was already showing her contempt for tradition by discarding the semi-chant which French tragedians had employed in their elocution. It was evident, too, that she was not to confine her art to

No Declaimer

the mere effectiveness of set speeches and particular scenes. The criticism of Mademoiselle Mars as to Rachel's power of listening already indicated one of the latter's finest histrionic attributes—her power to act from the moment she came upon the stage until she left, and to dominate the scene, whether she was speaking or not.

When the young actress reached Camille's imprecation, as we are told by de Varenne,

"instead of the classic elevation of the voice, and those noisy outbursts of grief which carry away the audience, and force applause, Mademoiselle Rachel, either through fatigue, calculation, or disdain of received traditions, uttered these words hoarsely, and with concentrated feeling, so that the public, who expected something very different, did not applaud."

We know, of course, that the hoarseness, which typified real human emotion rather than the rant of the unnaturally conventional performer, was a deliberate part of the impersonation. There was a very repose—the repose of deep feeling—that gave to Rachel's Camille an intensity such as the Parisians had never imagined. But Paris failed, at first, to understand this new method. "Ah!" exclaimed a young man

Waiting for Popularity

who stood in the box back of Mademoiselle Mars, "she lacks strength." "But, Monsieur," retorted Mars, "surely you will allow her to recruit her strength? Are you afraid she will not grow old soon enough? She grows taller while performing, this young girl."

When Garrick made his *début* in London his appeal to nature, in defiance of the stilted canons of the school of James Quin, was appreciated at once. Rachel had to wait a short time before receiving the stamp of public approval. Her early performances in classic drama failed to draw profitable audiences to the Comédie Française, and the actress in the company who ranked next to Rachel, and who had been an associate for some years, demanded that she should now be given the parts played by her rival. So disappointing was the first impression made by one of whom Samson had expected such mighty deeds. The director of the theatre refused to displace Mademoiselle Rachel, as she went on through the summer showing her exquisite art to half-filled benches.

It was Jules Janin, the great French critic, the future enemy of Fechter, who first called the attention of the Parisians to what they were missing.

Jules Janin

"We possess," he wrote, with true Gallic enthusiasm, "the most marvellous actress (although still only a child) that this generation has seen on the stage. . . . It is nothing short of marvellous, this uneducated child, without art, without preparation of any kind, thus becoming the interpreter of our grand old tragedies. She blows their ashes into a flame by her genius and energy; and, remember, she is small, ugly, with a narrow chest, an insignificant appearance, and common speech. Do not ask her who Tancrède, Horace, Hermione are, or about the Trojan war, or Pyrrhus, or Helen. She knows nothing; but she has that which is better than knowledge. She has that sudden illumination which she throws around her; she grows ten inches taller on the stage; she raises her voice and extends her chest; her eyes brighten; she treads like a sovereign; her voice vibrates instinct with the passion that agitates her."

Janin's praise was a trifle hysterical, but it was a French hysteria, backed by truth. It finally brought the Parisians to a realisation of the fact that they were neglecting genius. That is something that the people of the French capital, whatever may be their faults, are not prone to do. The theatre was soon crowded on the nights when Rachel performed; the receipts were unprecedented, and the fire and naturalness of her acting in

Money Matters

impossible parts, traits which had before been looked upon as the result of ignorance or mediocrity, now stood for rare dramatic virtues.

It might be supposed that the one ambition of Rachel would be to go on triumphing in her art and developing her wondrous talents. Not a bit of it. The members of the Félix family, after starving all their lives, lost their heads when they found that a future coiner of francs was within their walls. Rachel's father made demands, which were then considered exorbitant, upon the management of the theatre. A little matter of $12,000 per year, in salary and perquisites, would be now considered a bagatelle for a player of Rachel's distinction, but it was undoubtedly extravagant for those days of small stipends and scant theatrical profits. The public suddenly grew cold at what it considered the grasping disposition of its new idol, while Jules Janin fumed with a rage which he did not hesitate to express in print.

When Rachel played Roxane, in Racine's *Bajazet*, the audience was icy. The applause of the past few weeks was not to be repeated. Then Félix, *père*, took unto himself to say that his daughter should not repeat the performance, although a repetition had

Stormy Times

been announced. There was a stormy interview between the ex-pedler, who began to feel very important, and M. Védel, then the director of the Comédie. Védel told Félix peremptorily that if Rachel was not in her dressing-room by six o'clock on the evening for which *Bajazet* was billed, he would announce that she had refused to fulfil her engagement. She should never again appear in the theatre until she had played Roxane. "She shall not act," said Félix, as he left the director.

To Rachel the perturbed Védel wrote a letter begging her to stand firm against her father. On the night arranged for the repetition of the tragedy the actress reached the theatre punctually. When the director went to her dressing-room he found her dressed for the part of Roxane. She had prevailed against her father, she explained, and was determined to play Roxane, come what might. Védel asked her if she had read an article written by Janin, and just published in the *Débats*. She admitted having seen it, while she thought with bitterness of what this once friendly critic now said—that she was but a half-formed child who was totally unequal to the task of portraying Roxane. But her time would come, as she told the director. And it came that very

Paris Grows Hysterical

night. In spite of the diatribe of the powerful critic, and in spite of her unpopularity on the other night of *Bajazet*, she was overwhelmed with applause and flowers, as a reward for her superb performance. Her conquest was complete. Paris literally fell down and worshipped her, from the *gamins* to the *boulevardiers*, the artists, and the men and women of the most unimpeachable fashion. Madame Récamier welcomed the rising star to her *salon;* Chateaubriand complimented her, and King Louis Philippe sent her a thousand francs in token of his royal approval. And during the excitement the most placid person in Paris was Rachel herself, who was living with her family in a cheap house in an obscure street. She slept in the attic, and cooked for the household! What a strange compound of grandeur and littleness was this wonderful woman! To descend from the portrayal of the most sublime passions to the preparation of soup was a transition hard to appreciate excepting by the frugal class of Frenchmen or Frenchwomen to which she originally belonged. Yet exaltation of soul in one direction does not mean, as a rule, the same exaltation in other directions. Great authors have sometimes been pigmies in their private lives; great musicians have been known to

A Good Cook

grow petty; and great players have occasionally shown the money-hoarding spirit of a Shylock. Therefore why should we grudge Rachel the pleasure of her cooking?

There was never any false pride about Rachel. Nor was she ashamed to recall the days of her extreme poverty, even after she had ceased to cook for the Félixes and the family had attained the wild luxury of one servant. When Alfred de Musset and several friends once went home with her to take supper, after a performance of *Tancrède*, the actress sent this one servant off to the theatre, to bring back some jewelry. No one being left to cook the meal, Rachel cheerfully undertook the work herself. She quickly disappeared into the kitchen, whence she returned, in a few minutes, attired in a dressing-gown and nightcap, with a handkerchief tied under her chin and holding in her hands a dish of meat. "Help yourselves, Messieurs," she cried gaily, as she placed the dish on the dining-table. Then she returned to the kitchen, but was soon back again, as she brandished a tureen of soup in one delicate hand and a saucepan of spinach in the other. This, with a bowl of salad, formed the supper. There were no spoons or china plates, for they had been locked up in the buffet by

A Good Cook

the absent domestic, but *Mère* Félix reminded her daughter, very providentially, that there were tin plates in the kitchen.*

It was a jolly supper-party, in spite of the absence of china plates. Soon Rachel grew reminiscent, much to the disgust of her more pretentious sister, Sarah, as she told de Musset how strange it seemed to be able to own more than two pairs of stockings.

"And did you keep house for the family?" asked the poet. "I rose at six o'clock," answered Rachel, "and had all the beds made by eight o'clock. Then I went to market." "Were you extravagant?" laughingly inquired de Musset. "No, I was a very honest cook"—to which sentiment Madame Félix, with her mouth full, mumbled an assent.

"Only once," went on Rachel, "I robbed for a month; when I had bought four sous' worth of goods, I put down five, and when I had paid ten sous, I put down twelve. At the end of the month I found myself the happy possessor of three francs."

When de Musset asked her what she had done with those three francs, the girl was

* For a variety of excerpts anent Rachel, from memoirs and critiques, the reader may be referred to Nina H. Kennard's comprehensive and gracefully written biography of the actress. It does justice to a great subject.

London's Homage

silent. But the mother answered quickly, "Monsieur, she bought the works of Molière."

"Yes," said Rachel, "I already had a Corneille and a Racine. I wanted Molière. I bought it with my three francs and then confessed my sins."

Several years later, when Rachel had established herself in a sumptuous mansion of her own, Alfred de Musset reminded her of the night that he had supped with her off the tin plates. She laughed merrily and without constraint, as she recalled the incident, and assured her friend that riches had not spoiled her heart. What a queer, impulsive, cruel, kind, jealous heart it was!

After a series of triumphs at the Comédie Française, Rachel paid a visit to London (1841). Here she became the rage, and was received with an enthusiasm that almost took away her breath. Her first appearance at Her Majesty's Theatre, as Hermione in *Andromaque*, was attended by a bad attack of "stage-fright." When she came upon the stage—after the great audience had stupidly given a rousing welcome to a young actress whom it mistook for Rachel — Hermione's knees trembled so that she feared she would fall. But the spectators, now convinced that Rachel at last stood before

London's Homage

them, applauded so frantically that she felt reassured and gave a noble performance. At its conclusion, when she was called before the curtain, bouquets were hurled on the stage, hats and handkerchiefs waved from the boxes, and there were "Bravas" and cheers innumerable. During a subsequent performance of Mary Stuart two crowns fell at her feet, and, when she received thirteen thousand francs as her profits for this one representation, she was more delighted, no doubt, than at the artistic success of her new *rôle*. From the beginning to the end of her fitful life we can never forget that Rachel is counting her centimes, her francs, or her louis d'or with the ardour of the pedler's daughter. She would grow angry over the loss of a few sous at cards, at the same time that she would do many generous acts. She had, in short, her fits of generosity (as when she gave a poor author one thousand francs for a comedy which could never be produced) and her fits of parsimony. To her family, the members of which showed a cheerful readiness to live off her fortune, she was kind and munificent.

During this first visit to England Rachel was much petted by the Royal Family, and acted at Windsor before the Queen. Her experience at the Castle was one to test the

qualities of the tragedienne. She had no scenery or accessories to aid the illusion, but appeared in an alcove in one of the drawing-rooms, supported by two or three members of her company. But the effect was, so it is related, as striking as if she had been surrounded by an acre of picturesque canvas and a thousand gorgeous appointments.

Acting Before Royalty

On the second visit to England the majestic power of Rachel's acting was appreciated as fully as before, but her social prestige was well-nigh gone. Strange stories were told of this contradictory woman, who had recently been the heroine of an unfortunate love affair, and who bade defiance to the laws of conventionality. Some of the fierce passion that she portrayed upon the stage seemed to run riot in her own nature. Had it not been thus, the world would have had merely a Mademoiselle Félix, but no Rachel, to make of Phèdre such a vibrant, real creature, like an antique tigress come back to life. It was the very turbulence of her blood — the Mephistophelian gleam in her eye—that produced the wondrous actress. There was a saturnine, Napoleonic touch to Rachel, easily to be discerned amid her more feminine qualities. Curious is it not, therefore, that her son Alexander, by Count Walewski, should have been a grandson of the first

Classic Phèdre

Emperor? For Walewski was a natural son of Napoleon.

No wonder that the part of Phèdre is the one most intimately associated with the fame of Rachel. She herself considered it, with its mixture of so many human passions, the greatest of all Racine's characters, and in that assertion her artistic instinct spoke truly. There is a life and substance, albeit of a disagreeable kind, in Phèdre that we look for in vain in many of the lay figures of Racine. If we take up a dusty copy of the poet's works, and read the play, we may think this royal lady a rather archaic heroine, but there is still real flesh on her bones, and real blood in her veins, to anyone who can, by a wave of the wand of genius, bring her back to the footlights. Those of us who have no recollection of Rachel, but who saw Sara Bernhardt play Phèdre during her first American engagement, need not be told what a volcano of emotion may be made of this uncomfortable person who loved her stepson. If the divine Sara was alternately ferocious, sensual, and sublime in the *rôle*, what must have been Rachel? *

* In these later years the not unnatural affection of Madame Bernhardt for more modern authors is a fresh indication that Racine is being relegated to oblivion.

Classic Phèdre

When Rachel first played Phèdre, in 1843, she had passed through the bitter experience of that unfortunate love affair, and had learned something of grief, and life, and disappointment. She had not only "studied her sobs," but she felt them, as with the intensity of a purely personal emotion. The spectator forgot that he was watching the unfolding of a mythical story; he but saw Phèdre, the unholy woman, as he fell down and worshipped her, figuratively speaking, as if she had been some injured saint.

It was in the midst of the furore created by this new revelation of her power that Rachel, who was already beginning to show signs of ill health, took a pleasure trip to Switzerland. Even in the mountains the fame of Phèdre followed her weary footsteps. While she was sitting in an inn at the top of Montanvert she overheard a party of gay Parisians discussing her personal appearance. "How like Rachel she is!" said one of the ladies in the coterie, staring at the actress. "But it *is* Rachel herself!" answered a young man, presumably a collegian; "I saw her quite lately in Phèdre. Her face has remained imprinted on my memory." "Come, come," said a large, older man, "Rachel is not nearly as pretty as this charming person." The discussion

"I am Rachel"

waxed so energetic that the identity of the actress was finally made the matter of a wager of—a leg of mutton! At this point Rachel left the inn, and started to explore, with the aid of guides, the *Mer de Glace*. As she was crossing a *crevasse* she came face to face with the large, older man. Gazing at her intently, after some slight embarrassment, he said in a low voice, which he intended that she should hear: "Nature and art! All are admirable!" Rachel, only intent upon keeping her footing on the slippery ground, made no sign of satisfaction at the compliment. The inquisitive tourist, now quite sure, from her stolidity, that this could not be the actress, turned back to his own party, crying, "You see, it is not Rachel. I have won my bet!" But Rachel, returning to the inn before the gentleman, wrote in the visitors' book: "Pay the leg of mutton, Monsieur; I am RACHEL!"

Of the feverish existence which Rachel led for some years, of her visits to Berlin and other cities, of the honours heaped upon her, and of her constantly increasing physical weakness and unhappiness, it is not within the compass of this sketch to relate. One lingers pleasantly, however, on the royal courtesies accorded this product of

Imperial Honours

the streets—this singer of ballads and vender of flowers — when she appeared in St. Petersburg. Throughout all the glitter of her reception at the theatre she remained the pale, inscrutable woman, willing to accept a homage which could not give her more than passing pleasure, and longing for a day when she could have a little rest. But when a great dinner was given in her honour at the Imperial Palace, she caught some of the intoxication, and it seemed as if the acme of her glory had been reached. To one of her sisters she wrote from St. Petersburg that she was taken in to dinner by a Grand Duke, a brother of the Emperor.

"All this tra-la-la of princes and princesses, curious and attentive, never took their eyes off me for a moment, watching my every movement, every smile, and listening to every word I spoke. You must not think I was embarrassed. Not the least in the world. My self-possession never forsook me for a moment until the middle of the repast, which, by the way, was very good; but everyone seemed more occupied with watching me than eating their dinner. At that moment the toasts in my honour began, and the scene that took place was a most extraordinary one. The young archdukes, to get a better view of me, rose, mounted on their chairs, and even put their feet upon the table — I was going to say

Imperial Honours

into the plates. No one seemed astonished. Evidently there is still a great deal of the savage in the princes of this country. They shouted, cried 'Brava!' and called upon me to recite something. To reply to toasts by a tragic tirade was, indeed, strange, but I was equal to the occasion.

"I rose, pushed back my chair, assumed the most tragic air of my repertoire, and rushed into the great scene in Phèdre. A deathlike silence came over the company; you could have heard a fly were there any in this country. They all listened religiously, bent forward towards me with gestures of profound admiration. Then, when I had come to an end, there was a fresh outbreak of cries of 'Brava!' clink of glasses, and renewed toasts, to such an extent that I remained a moment quite overcome. Soon, however, the excitement took possession of me, the fumes of the wine, the scent of the flowers, all this enthusiasm, which certainly flattered my vanity, got into my head. I again rose, and began to sing, or rather to declaim, the Russian National Hymn. On this it was no longer enthusiasm, but frenzy. They crowded around me, they pressed my hand, they thanked me. I was the greatest tragedienne of all time, past and future!"

To have watched the inspired actress as she chanted the Russian anthem, under the influence of some grand emotion which was

An Ideal Moment

reality instead of art, must have been, to an excitable spectator, one of the ideal moments of a lifetime. It suggested the days of '48, when Rachel suddenly seized a French flag, and fiercely declaimed, or sang, the *Marseillaise*, before an audience delirious in its mad enthusiasm. But the singing of the *Marseillaise* was the result of deliberation, a carefully studied effect, intended to fill the coffers of the Comédie Française. The incident at the Imperial Palace was, on the other hand, a spontaneous performance, and more magnificent, in its way, than even the premeditated fire of a Phèdre, an Adrienne Lecouvreur, or a Camille.

It was on the return from Russia, after all this pomp and exhilaration, that Rachel had to mourn, in her tragic, impassioned fashion, the death of her sister Rebecca. When she heard that this sister, who was lying ill of consumption, had suddenly been taken worse, she tore from her arm a rosary blessed by the Pope, which, Jewess though she might be, had been kept by her as a talisman. "It is this that has brought the curse upon me!" she cried wildly, as she dashed the rosary on the floor and hurried from the room. After Rebecca had passed away, and it came the turn of Rachel to ask

Brontë's Tribute

forgiveness of the corpse, according to an ancient rite, there was such a look of despair on her face, that it seemed as if she were about to burst forth into some dreadful frenzy of sorrow. She restrained herself, but she was crushed, for a time, by Rebecca's death. Perhaps she realised that in a few years her own life would go out in the same way.

It was this terrible element in Rachel that gave to her art its thrilling, uncanny, almost diabolical intensity. How startlingly she stands out, through the dim lapse of years, as we read the description which Charlotte Brontë gives of this creature who was

"neither of woman nor of man. . . . Hate, and murder, and madness incarnate she stood. It was a marvellous sight, a mighty revelation. . . . She stood, not dressed, but draped in pale antique folds, long and regular like sculpture. A background, and entourage, and flooring of deepest crimson threw her out, white like alabaster — like silver — rather, be it said, like death. Wicked, perhaps, she is; but also she is strong, and her strength has conquered beauty, has overcome grace, and bound both at her side, captives peerlessly fair, and docile as fair. Even in the uttermost frenzy of energy is each varied movement royally, imperially, exceedingly upborne. Her hair, flying loose in revel



RACHEL.

FROM A COLORED PRINT.

Brontë's Tribute

or war, is still an angel's hair, and glorious under a halo. . . . I have seen acting before, but never anything like this: never anything which astonished Hope and hushed Desire; which outstripped Impulse and paled Conception; which, instead of merely irritating Imagination with the thought of what *might* be done, at the same time fevering the nerves because it was *not* done, disclosed power like a deep, swollen winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul like a leaf, on the steep and stately sweep of its descent."

And what a capricious, provoking person this woman could be when the mood seized her. How shabbily she treated Legouvé, the author of *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, when he undertook to write *Medea* for the actress. If she had said frankly, after the tragedy had been read to her, that she did not care for the subject, and wanted a modern *rôle*, the author would have had little ground for complaint. Instead of doing that, however, she accepted the play, with the consent of the *sociétaires* of the Comédie Française. *Medea* was put in rehearsal, while the delighted Legouvé could already see, in fancy, the dazzling success of the piece. Two weeks later he received a letter stating that the rehearsals must be suspended, owing to the ill-health and professional engagements

Woes of a Dramatist

of the actress, who was about to start for Russia. Then Rachel wrote the disappointed author, begging him not to be angry.

"I keep *Medea*," she added, "and hope to find her still a virgin on my return; but, whatever happens, I like her well enough to rescue her from whoever may have taken possession of her. . . . You have told me you were my friend. This is the moment to prove it to me."

Legouvé had no desire to prove his friendliness in the way suggested by Rachel. He rushed to her house. "*Madame est sortie*," said the servant. He went back a few hours later. "*Madame est malade*," said another servant. Several nights after this unsuccessful visit there was a violent scene, at the theatre, between Rachel and the playwright. On her return from Russia, when she had partly recovered from her grief over the death of Rebecca Félix, she wrote to a friend, with an ingenuousness which was overdone, begging her to inform Legouvé that she had finally decided never to act *Medea*. It was a decision which she had come to upon the very morning when the tragedy had first been read to her by the author. The title-part had repelled her at once. It was too full of movement, she said, to suit

Ristori's Triumph

one who excelled rather in facial expression, statuesque attitude, or measured gestures, than in energetic pantomime. Medea, she added, might murder her children, and poison her father-in-law, but Rachel was unable to follow her example. She could not allow herself to be "made the accomplice of theatrical favouritism."

Unpleasant litigation followed this positive refusal of Rachel to produce *Medea*, and the author was awarded damages to the amount of twelve thousand francs. In the end he had his revenge. He offered the tragedy to Ristori, who played the part superbly.

It was the appearance of Ristori in Paris, and the enthusiastic reception accorded her, that warned Rachel that her own star was on the wane. The fickle Parisians flocked to see the Italian tragedienne, and forgot their own countrywoman at the Comédie Française. The passionate Rachel went to the Italian Opera House to see the rival, but her proud, jealous heart would not permit her to applaud. The plaudits of the crowded audience sounded like the funeral-knell of her own popularity. "Madame," said the adroit Legouvé, when Ristori complained that the French artiste had not applauded, "Rachel's jealousy was the one

Dreams of Avarice

thing wanting to confirm your fame." M. Legouvé was now worshipping at a new shrine, and *Medea* had at last found a home.

It was the success of Ristori that determined Rachel to go to the United States. Her brother, Raphael Félix, had long urged upon her the feasibility of an American engagement. Enormous profits for his sister, and for himself as manager, danced before his eyes, and the eyes of the whole family. So she finally resolved, not without misgivings, to gather laurels and dollars across the ocean. "Young America," she said, "shall grow older from the emotions our fine old tragedies will arouse in her."

On the 3d of September, 1855, Rachel made her *début* before the New World, in the city of New York. Corneille, as represented by *Les Horaces*, triumphed for the moment, and was then forgotten, but the triumph of the actress seemed for all time. This white-draped Camille who looked like some ancient prophetess suddenly lifted from a temple of old, and wafted to a land where there were neither temples, or ruins, took the fancy of the audience from the moment that she appeared in her first scene in *Les Horaces*. She was so new, yet so antique; her art was a study in the modern methods of intensity, free from bombast, at

the same time that her individuality might have been created, like that of a John Philip Kemble, for a Roman of the Romans; her elocution and her feeling were both nature, while her attitudes seemed to have been borrowed from sculptured marble. Once, as Camille sank fainting in her chair, a spectator of more enthusiasm than judgment threw an enormous bouquet upon the stage. The player who was declaiming to Rachel would have picked it up, but she stopped him with an energetic word which showed that she, at least, had the true idea of the value of illusion. To affect grief at one moment, and sieze flowers on the rebound, was not to the taste of this great purist.

When the play was over Rachel came forward, pale and agitated, to receive the plaudits, as the brilliant house cheered her to the echo, to the accompaniment of waving hats and handkerchiefs, and a shower of bouquets. The ovation overpowered the exhausted actress. She tottered, and then, as the curtain fell, some one rushed forward to catch her as she fainted. Her triumph was secured. But the receipts failed to reach, on future evenings, the hopes of the visitors. Rachel, who had looked upon this American engagement as a money-making scheme, must have been sadly disappointed.

Dying by Inches

In Philadelphia Rachel caught a bad cold, collapsed, and was soon on her way to Charleston, by the advice of the physicians, that she might escape the rigours of a northern winter. It was in the latter city, on the 17th of December, 1855, that she made her last appearance on any stage, as Adrienne Lecouvreur. Already, had she but known it, she was dying by inches of consumption. Strange it was that this revivifier of old world creations should end her dramatic life in the new continent. Next she was in Havana, whence she wrote to Paris:

"I am ill—very ill. My body and mind have both sunk down to nothing. I shall not be able to act at Havana either; but I have come, and the director [of the theatre], exerting his rights, has demanded damages to the extent of seven thousand piastres. I paid, and have also paid the actors up to to-day. I bring back my routed army to the banks of the Seine, and I, perhaps like another Napoleon, will go and ask a stone on which to lay my head and die at the Invalides. . . . I do not regret the money I have lost; I do not regret the fatigue I have undergone. I have carried my name as far as I could, and I bring back my heart to those who love me."

Back to France went the tragedienne,

"Done with Illusions"

never more to act or to care over much whether or not Ristori had taken her place. "I have done with illusions," she said sadly to one of her friends, "I see myself already in the tomb." From Meulan she wrote to another friend:

"Eighteen years of passionate tirades on the stage, wild expeditions to every quarter of the globe, winters at Moscow, treachery at Waterloo, the storm-tossed sea, the ungrateful land, —all these soon age a little bit of a woman like me. But God protects the brave, and He seems to have created expressly for me a little corner, unnamed on any map, where I can forget my troubles, my fatigues, my premature old age!"

There were times when the woman thought of the past, and of her sins, as she regretted that she had not lived an obscure life, and thus have seen more of her devoted children. To Houssaye she said serenely:

"Dragged by fate to Paris, I was obliged to live the life of Paris, passing from misery to luxury, exposed to dangers and temptations. My calumniators did not succeed in making me immoral. God loved me, since He gave me children. The justice of God is greater towards poor, weak mortals than the justice of men. I do not fear Him, for I know there are mothers

"Done with Illusions"

of families who will not be better received than I shall be at the Mercy Seat."

It is not for us to judge the morality, or the want of it, in Rachel. She was a Parisienne by adoption, and a girl of the street by birth. Her temptations were enormous, while the very nature of her genius made her defiant of social restraint.

It was during the summer of 1856 that Rachel was ordered to Egypt. At Cairo she held a sort of miniature court, in spite of the gradual progress of her malady, and often read from the Bible, Fénelon, and her favourite Corneille. Then she travelled up the Nile. She was despondent one moment, and then again quite sure that she would recover. At last she was home again in Paris, no longer the splendid, the brilliant Rachel, but a shadow, a mere skeleton. Towards the approach of winter she retired to Le Cannet, in search of a more salubrious climate. But she must take one last look at the Gymnase Theatre, and the Comédie Française, ere she departed. On the day she was to leave the capital she arose very early, and was driven to the scene of her first success — the scene of *La Vendéene* — and then to the home of her later, more enduring, glories. What must have been the

thoughts that filled the once haughty, but now crushed spirit!

"Poor Woman!"

At Le Cannet Rachel lingered on until the beginning of 1858. White as snow, but with her burning, fatal eyes only made the brighter by the fever that consumed her within, she began to sink from New Year's Day. She had drawn up and signed her will, left all her last instructions, and made some presents to those who watched around her. On the evening of the 3d of January, after an attack of intense suffocation, she sank into a stupor from which her sister Sarah tried in vain to rouse the sufferer. Then, as a Jewish rabbi, who had been summoned to the bedside, chanted in solemn numbers, Rachel murmured a line from *Les Horaces:*

"*Ma chère patrie et mon premier amour.*"

At last, with the name of "Rebecca," her dead sister, upon her lips, she passed away. Her country, her art, her family, and her lover—she had loved them all—her country and her art wisely, her family and her lover but too well.

"Poor woman! Oh, the poor woman," cried one of her friends as she threw flowers on the tragedienne's grave.

"Poor Woman!"

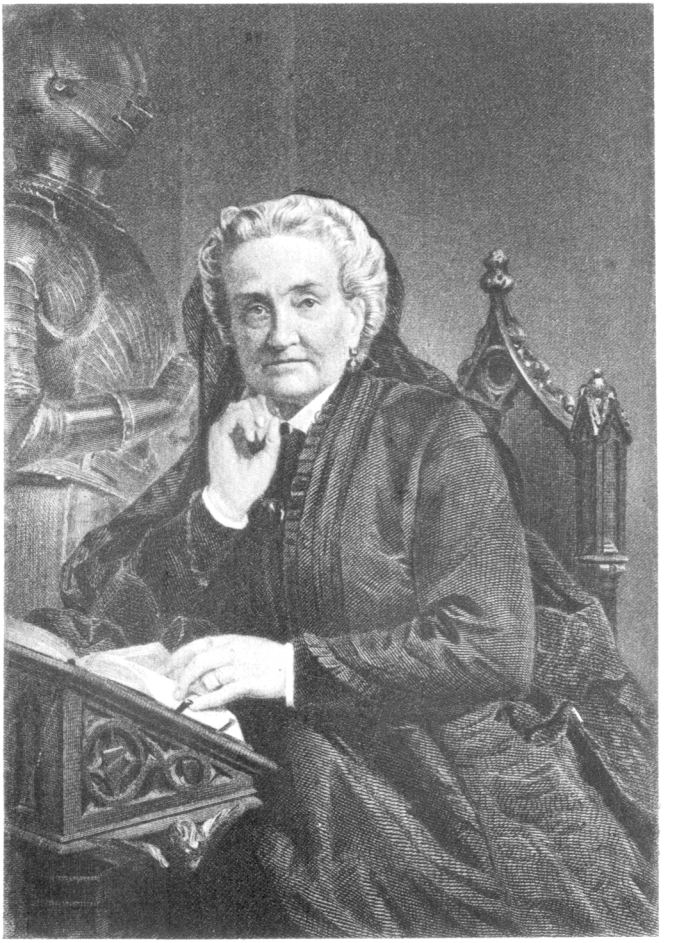
The memory of Rachel is for all time. In the naturalness and spontaneity of her art she resembles the tragic impressiveness of a Garrick. Without his versatility — for she was deficient in comedy, which knew her not —she had much of his tumultuous genius. In the uncomfortable restlessness of her disposition, and in her wild, uncertain temperament, she suggests an Edmund Kean. Among women there is none to whom we can compare her. She stood alone—a mass of contradiction, like many other women, but unlike them in a grandeur that was almost masculine. George Sand had something of this masculinity, but Sand was without the player's depth of passionate feeling. Rachel defied analysis. She might descend to the earth earthy, to count her francs or soil the skirts of her morality, but when she trod the boards she seemed to stand on the summit of Olympus. For posterity she will always be Olympian.

' The unseen hands that shape our fate
Moulded her strongly, made her great,
And gave her for her dower
Abundant life and power.''

—*R. H. Stoddard.*

Charlotte Cushman.

From a steel engraving.





CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN

A Moral Antidote

AFTER reading and re-reading the *Reminiscences* of Macready and of Fanny Kemble one might turn, for a sort of moral antidote, to a study of Charlotte Cushman's earnest, interested life. With Macready, or with Mrs. Butler, we tire of the melancholy strain — that hatred of the stage — which is constantly dinned into our ears. What is more refreshing than to see a man or woman in love with his or her profession, whether that profession be the theatre, the church, the workshop, or the kitchen ?

It may be said of Charlotte Cushman that she was one of those strenuous, noble souls who would have dignified and vitalised, as with the vitality of a man, any calling into which it might have pleased accident to place her, and that she would have left the world the better for her presence. For this mental pertinacity, as we might call it, we

"Born a Tomboy"

can credit the sturdy Puritan stock from which she was descended. The best blood of New England — the blood which had made both martyrs and honest, hopeless bigots — ran through her veins. Her father was a respected merchant of Boston, and it was in that city that Charlotte Saunders Cushman was born (July 23, 1816). "I was born a tomboy," she related years after this interesting occurrence.

"My earliest recollections are of dolls ruthlessly cracked open to see what they were thinking about; I was possessed with the idea that dolls could and did think. . . . Climbing trees was an absolute passion; nothing pleased me so much as to take refuge in the top of the tallest tree, when affairs below waxed troubled or insecure. I was very destructive to toys and clothes, tyrannical to brothers and sister, but very social, and a great favourite with other children." *

There was always, to the end of her life, this virile instinct in the woman, which made her great without giving to her any unpleasant masculinity. She might develop a majesty almost king-like, but her heart

* Let the reader who would like to trace the influence of hereditary vigour in the character of Miss Cushman consult the opening chapter of Emma Stebbins's authoritative *Memories* of the actress.

Girlish Ambitions

was truly feminine. Another characteristic of the child, and one destined to exert a mighty influence over her future career, was her imitative power, whereby she could mimic a variety of animals, as well as the tones, movements, and expressions of the people with whom she was thrown. In school she distinguished herself as a reader, and gave such impressiveness, on one memorable occasion, to a scene from Payne's tragedy of *Brutus*, that she was immediately moved up to the head of her class. "No wonder she can read," cried her fellow-pupils, "for she goes to the theatre!" It was about this time that Charlotte appeared as Selim in the operetta of *Bluebeard*, amid the not over-gorgeous surroundings afforded by the attic of her mother's house. Friends were already beginning to speak of her voice, which was afterwards to develop into a superb contralto of much richness in the lower tones.

It was this voice that was soon to aid her in the struggle for existence. Her father met with business reverses, and Charlotte now began to take lessons in music, and, subsequently, to sing in Boston church choirs. Later, when Mary Anne Wood came to Boston, the girl, then about nineteen years of age, sang at several of the vis-

Girlish Ambitions

itor's concerts, with pronounced success. Mrs. Wood was so much pleased, indeed, with the voice of the *débutante* that she urged her to cultivate it, and not to waste it in the mere drudgery of teaching. And thus it happened that Miss Cushman became the pupil of James G. Maeder (afterwards the husband of Clara Fisher), and made her appearance under his instruction, in April of 1835, as the Countess Almaviva in the *Marriage of Figaro*. This performance, which took place at the Tremont Theatre, was considered quite a triumph.

In a short time Miss Cushman was singing with the Maeders in New Orleans. Roseate visions of future operatic achievements danced before her eyes, when suddenly—all seemed dark and cheerless. Her voice had failed her, from overstraining of the upper register. It is said that it was her ambition to produce effects for which her vocal methods were not fitted that brought on this catastrophe. Be that as it may, she had to face the fact that her life as a prima-donna or concert singer was over at its very commencement. In this predicament the unhappy girl asked the advice of Caldwell, the New Orleans theatrical manager. "You ought to be an actress, and not a singer," he said decisively. "If you will study a

few dramatic parts I will get Mr. Barton, the tragedian of our theatre, to hear you, and to take an interest in you!"

No Costumes!

Barton was so much impressed by Miss Cushman's undeveloped power that he actually proposed that she should act Lady Macbeth when he appeared, at his own benefit, as Macbeth. To this arrangement Caldwell consented.

"So enraptured was I," said Miss Cushman, "with the idea of acting this part, and so fearful of anything preventing me, that I did not tell the manager I had no dresses, until it was too late for me to be prevented from acting it; and the day before the performance, after rehearsal, I told him. He immediately sat down and wrote a note of introduction for me to the tragedienne of the French Theatre, which then employed some of the best among French artists for its company. This note was to ask her to help me to costumes for the rôle of Lady Macbeth. I was a tall, thin, lanky girl at that time, about five feet, six inches, in height. The Frenchwoman, Madame Closel, was a short, fat person of not more than four feet, ten inches, her waist fully twice the size of mine, with a very large bust; but her shape did not prevent her being a very great actress. The ludicrousness of her clothes being made to fit me struck her at once. She roared with laughter; but she

A Tragic Touch

was very good-natured, saw my distress, and set to work to see how she could help it. By dint of piecing out the skirt of one dress it was made to answer for an underskirt, and then another dress was taken in in every direction to do duty as an overdress, and to make up the costume. And thus I essayed, for the first time, the part of Lady Macbeth, fortunately to the satisfaction of the audience and manager, and all the members of the company."

There was evidently, even in that youthful performance of Lady Macbeth, a true tragic touch, and that intensity of tone and feeling that was always to distinguish the massive art of this actress.

At the end of the season in New Orleans Miss Cushman began a journey to New York, through the uncomfortable medium of a sailing vessel, which took her as far as Philadelphia. But one of those little shocks which aspiring youth sometimes receives from middle-aged prudence awaited her arrival in Gotham. When she applied to Simpson, the manager of the Park Theatre, for an engagement, that autocrat offered her "a trial." She thought of her triumph as Lady Macbeth, and felt humiliated that she was now expected to be tested like any novice who had never been before the footlights. While the young lady was revolv-

Life in Earnest

ing in her mind whether or not she should submit to this "trial," which would be one to her in more ways than one, Thomas Hamblin, the manager of the Bowery Theatre, suddenly appeared on the scene. The tragedian Barton, so he told Miss Cushman, had spoken to him so glowingly of her acting that he was anxious to see her rehearse. "If you are like what your friend says," he added, "I will make as great a success for you as I did for another actress — Miss Vincent."

As Miss Cushman afterwards confessed, she was then too much of a child to understand the advantage of even an inferior place at the Park Theatre, with its excellent stock company, over a commanding position in a second-class theatre. Fired to enthusiasm at the prospect held out by Hamblin, she recited before him scenes from *Jane Shore*, *Macbeth*, *The Stranger*, and other plays, until he, highly pleased, engaged her for three years at a salary to begin with twenty-five dollars a week. Forthwith, with characteristic generosity, she brought her mother and several members of her family to New York, and procured a situation there for her eldest brother. Then, a week before she was to make her *début* at the Bowery, she succumbed to a serious attack of rheumatic

Life in Earnest

fever. It was a provoking situation, quite apart from her physical sufferings, for the girl had but four weeks to act in New York. At the end of that time she was to go, under the terms of Hamblin's contract, to other cities.

These were anxious moments, and none the less so because Miss Cushman had been obliged to go into debt to her manager that she might buy a theatrical wardrobe. On the very last week of the four to be devoted to her New York performances (September, 1836), she had conquered illness, and was playing Lady Macbeth, Alicia in *Jane Shore*, and Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger*. Her reception was flattering enough, although she had come almost without prestige; and Hamblin was more than satisfied. But the excitement was too much for the overstrained nerves, and for the body, not yet thoroughly rid of rheumatism. She went back to bed, from excessive weakness, and left her costumes in the theatre. A few days later the Bowery Theatre was burned to the ground, with all her wardrobe. What was worse, her three-years' contract was now useless, and she found herself almost penniless, with her father's family to support!

Her accustomed energy now came to res-

Success in Albany

cue her in this plight. As soon as she was out of bed she secured an engagement at the principal theatre in Albany. In that city, where she had the companionship of her mother and one of her brothers, the plucky girl became a great favourite. She boarded at a hotel where also resided a number of the members of the State Senate and House of Representatives, who were much attracted by the indomitable perseverance of Miss Cushman. When it became known that Governor Marcy, then a Senator at Washington, was a cousin of Mrs. Cushman's, the relationship helped to better the social position of the family, as little things of this kind have done before. It was jokingly observed that more of the members of the State Legislature could be found at Charlotte's benefits than at the Albany Capitol.

It was at the close of this engagement that Miss Cushman was almost incapacitated for work from the death, by falling from a horse which she herself had given him, of the young brother who had accompanied her to Albany. It was not the first grief in her life. We are told of a disappointment in love — "a spring storm" which, in after days, she learned to look upon as an experience that only led her to "a clearer, better,

"Spring Storms"

richer, and more productive summer." * When the second sorrow came, as she herself graphically expresses it, the "world seemed again to liquefy" beneath her feet and the "waters went over" her soul.

"It became necessary that I should suffer *bodily* to cure my heart-bleed. I placed myself professionally where I found and knew all the mortifications in my profession, which seemed for the time to strew ashes over the loss of my child-brother (for he was my child, and loved me best in all the world), thus conquering my art which, God knows, has never failed me—never failed to bring me rich reward, never failed to bring me comfort. I conquered my grief and myself. *Labour* saved me then and always, and so I proved the eternal goodness of God."

In those lines one sees Charlotte Cushman without the aid of biographer or commentator. It was at this period of transition that she put away any foolish idea of succeeding without first serving a stern apprenticeship. She saw how little she understood of the details, the polish of her profession: she became aware that "no one could ever sail a ship by entering at the cabin window; he must serve, and learn his trade before the

* *Vide* Clara Erskine Clement's biography of Miss Cushman.

mast." When the girl had played Lady Macbeth in New Orleans she had been entering at the cabin window, or beginning at the top round of the ladder.

"General Utility"

In order that she might serve "before the mast" Miss Cushman accepted an engagement to play "general utility" parts at the Park Theatre, New York, under the management of the same Mr. Simpson who had wounded her by suggesting that humiliating "trial." For three years, from September of 1837 to September of 1840, she remained at the Park Theatre (acting a variety of parts which materially enhanced her technique and prepared the way for her genius), besides playing several incidental engagements in other cities. No finer discipline could have been obtained. She came out of the ordeal a true actress who was not afraid to play Romeo, Portia, Lady Macbeth, Joan of Arc, Belvidera in *Venice Preserved*, Roxana in *The Rival Queens*, and many other characters. An Englishman who strayed one night into the Park Theatre, to wax drowsy over a sleepy performance of *Othello*, was suddenly brought back to wakefulness by the acting of a large, fair-complexioned, impressive unknown who played Emilia.

"The effect of her denunciation of the Moor,

British Foresight

after the murder of Desdemona, was electric. The few lines of high passion which the part contains, by the power with which the actress delivered them, made the part, insignificant though it is, the leading one on that occasion. By looking at the bill I found the name of this actress to be Charlotte Cushman. She was rapturously applauded, and this was the only hearty applause that was given during the evening. I knew that there was no ordinary artiste in this then comparatively unknown young woman. I saw her next in Lady Macbeth, and my conviction was only the more confirmed by this terrible test of any genius. I went away filled with admiration, resolved to see this powerful actress as often as I should have the opportunity. I then foresaw her fame, and time has justified my prophecy.

"Sometimes the intensity with which her acting affected me also vexed me," says this wise critic, referring to later performances. "*The Stranger* and *Fazio* are both plays that I could never see for their own sakes, but I have been so moved by Miss Cushman's Mrs. Haller and Bianca, that I have gone home ill from the effect of the acting. I was unutterably ashamed of myself, to be so prostrated by compositions of such spasmodic melodrama, and such maudlin sentiment; but the artiste created the tragedy in her own person, and that which was frigid in the book became pathetic in the woman."

Artistic Vigour

What, it may be asked, was the secret of the power which this actress, still unrecognised by the public at large, already possessed in abundant measure? She had, in a word, the faculty of compelling sympathy by the very strength of her art. In this she may be compared to Madame Janauschek, the only artiste who can be likened to her for what might be termed rugged effect. As Janauschek charmed by herculean method and grandeur of tone, so did Charlotte Cushman. It was not merely a matter of dramatic force. Beneath that force one detected heart and feeling, so that even in Lady Macbeth the spectator had a sneaking *tendre* for a woman who might have been capable of finer things had she not been devoured by masculine ambition. If there was something of the stern Puritan blood of her ancestors in the acting of Miss Cushman, there was, likewise, a human touch which glorified it and deprived it of harshness. It was this touch that made her Lady Macbeth natural, in spite of her tendency to bully Macbeth, to "pitch into him," and to "get him into a corner of the stage." There were many original strokes of the brush in this picture of the Thane's wife, notably in the interview with Duncan, where, "though playing the hostess to perfection, she never for a moment

Meg Merrilies

permitted the audience to lose sight of the fact that socially and by birth she was the peer of the king." There was the recklessness of genius in this portrayal, and Clara Erskine Clement quotes Lawrence Barrett's assertion that Cushman played Lady Macbeth upon the theory that both she and Macbeth were, through the more important scenes, under the influence of wine.

It was during her "utility" work at the Park Theatre that Miss Cushman accidentally stumbled, as it were, into a part that was to win her even greater popularity, though not more praise, than her Lady Macbeth. During an engagement which John Braham, the sweet-voiced English tenor, was filling at this house, he brought out a musical dramatisation of *Guy Mannering*, in which he took the *rôle* of Harry Bertram. Only a few hours before the time of performance Mrs. Chippendale, the Meg Merrilies, was taken suddenly ill. Who was now to play the gypsy? Miss Cushman was asked to fill the breach. "If you cannot learn the lines of the part by night," said the manager, "you may read them on the stage." But when the curtain went up on *Guy Mannering* the young woman not only knew her lines by heart—for she was a quick "study"—but she had formed, on

Meg Merrilies

the spur of the moment, an idea of Meg that was, in its weird way, really sublime. There was an uncanny charm, a wealth of picturesqueness, and, at the same time, a depth of senile feeling in her portraiture that stamped it at once with the mark of inspiration. It was not the Merrilies of Walter Scott, but the Merrilies of Cushman.

The audience was startled into enthusiasm by this new creation. So was John Braham. He rushed to the dressing-room of Meg, on the conclusion of the piece, and cried: "I have come to thank you, Miss Cushman, for the most veritable sensation I have experienced for a long time. I give you my word, when I turned and saw you in that first scene, I felt a cold chill run all over me!" The actress was amazed. She had not realised the excellence of her performance, and fancied, when she heard the Englishman knocking at her dressing-room door, that he had come to scold her about something. In after years Meg Merrilies became one of the greatest pillars of her fame, although it was not the character that she liked the best, or that she would have played as often as she did were it not that the public fairly forced her to it. No doubt Queen Katherine and several other parts were more to her taste. But no one who ever saw Meg Merrilies,

Nancy Sikes

be he an astute critic or an unthinking theatregoer, will ever forget its terrible effectiveness. It was tragic melodrama, as was also her Nancy Sikes, but it was of a higher type than the latter. Her Nancy was almost too graphic. It caused the shivers to run up and down the spine of the spectator until he asked himself later at night, when he could not sleep for thinking of the death scene, whether such a picture of misery was worth the talent that had been devoted to its study. For if Nancy had, in the novel, simply the reality of a Dickens, she was endowed, on the stage, with the reality of a Zola.

Meg Merrilies did not bring Miss Cushman into immediate favour. She had several years of constant up-hill work before her ere she could emerge into the full light of success. On leaving the Park Theatre she began playing male characters, while her sister, Susan, took the opposite feminine parts. This was a daring experiment which seems to have proved more artistic than might have been expected. She also created Lady Gay Spanker for the first American production of *London Assurance*, and tried a season's management of the Walnut Street Theatre, in Philadelphia. At the Walnut one of the most attractive members of her

company chanced to be the sprightly Alexina Fisher, who afterwards married Mr. Baker, and became the mother of the present Mrs. John Drew.

Macready's Help

But it was her professional association with Macready, during the seasons of 1843 and 1844, that provided the stepping-stone for which Charlotte Cushman had been groping. Macready was then making a tour of America, with the support of American players found in the different cities. When Miss Cushman acted Lady Macbeth to the Macbeth of the visitor, he was interested in one who, as he records, "showed mind and sympathy" with his own performance — "a novelty so refreshing to me on the stage." From that moment Macready showed, in his turn, a sympathy for the aspiring woman that was of inestimable value to her, and greatly to his own credit. They again played together, as Miss Cushman profited more and more by that wonderful knowledge of stagecraft which he had long since mastered. It must have been a curious fellowship, with inspiration on the one side, and, on the other side, abundance of merit without one flash of inspiration. But what a bad performance the two must have given in *Much Ado About Nothing!* What an uncompromising Benedick; what a heavy

Macready's Help

Beatrice! Surely the Muses never endowed the lady with the true spirit of comedy. Her face, form, voice, and disposition forbade it, in spite of the fact that she was far from possessing, when off the stage, the tragic trend of a Sarah Siddons. In private life she was an intellectual but unaffected woman.

Owing to the encouragement given to her by Macready, Miss Cushman now determined to go to England. It seemed a rash thing to do, but the end justified the risk. She herself realised what a radical step she was taking in thus trying to win, among strangers, a position which she could not gain in her own country. But Macready had told her that in London her talents would be appreciated at their true value.

After reaching England, in November of 1844, Miss Cushman, who had as yet no definite engagement, asserted her customary energy by "doing" the sights of Scotland, in true American fashion, and then dashing over to Paris — if to cross the Channel may be called by that name — to see the plays and players of the French theatres. In the meantime she found that there was a chance to make her *début* with Macready as a sort of rival, or supplanter, of Helen Faucit. The American was too tactful, and too generous,

Début in London

to imperil her success by any such arrangement. She refused the offer, and bided her time — although her exchequer was running very low — until the right opportunity should arrive. It came, when she and her faithful maid had but a few shillings left, in a visit to their London lodgings from Maddox, the manager of the Princess's Theatre.

Mr. Maddox asked her to support Edwin Forrest, who was about to appear at this house. According to the story of the interview, the actress behaved with admirable diplomacy, and gave no hint of the emptiness of her purse. "I will act with Mr. Forrest on two conditions," she said. "In the first place, I must have £10 a night; in the second place, I must have one night, before Forrest comes, for my *début* in a great part!" The manager agreed, and on the night of February 14, 1845, Miss Cushman first appeared in London as Bianca, the heroine of *Fazio*. The night was unpleasant, and the audience meagre, and at first apathetic. But as the story began to develop, and Bianca alternated in magnificent flashes of jealousy, hate, love, and tenderness, the spectators woke up to the fact that a powerful tragedienne stood before them. When at last she fell upon her knees to supplicate

Golden Criticism

her proud rival, and then, repulsed and exhausted, "sank huddled into a heap at her feet," there was no further question as to Bianca's success. She had made the "hit" of which all struggling players dream. Showers of flowers showed the friendliness, if not the numerical strength, of her audience.

The critics were lavish in their praise of the newcomer.

"Since the memorable first appearance of Edmund Kean in 1814," wrote one of them, "never has there been such a *début* on the boards of an English theatre. She is, without exception, the very first actress that we have. True, we have ladylike, accomplished, finished artistes; but there is a wide and unpassable gulf between them and Miss Cushman — the gulf which divides talent, even of the very highest order, from genius. That godlike gift is Miss Cushman's, strictly speaking."

The critic of the "Thunderer" placed upon her the hall-mark of his powerful approval by saying that for passion, "real, impetuous, irresistible passion," Miss Cushman had not then her superior. Her intensity, her quick apprehension of "readings," her power "to dart from emotion to emotion with the greatest rapidity, as if carried on by impulse alone," were all acknowledged by this reviewer.

Golden Criticism

The honours which Miss Cushman had failed to find in her own land were now showered upon her in a foreign country. They were eloquent tributes to her art, for the fact that she was an "American cousin," or an "American Indian," was nothing in her favour so far as the London public was concerned. She came, acted, and conquered with little more to recommend her, in advance, than the friendship of Macready. That friendship was pleasant to possess, particularly as Macready was not prone to admire other players than himself, but it could have done nothing towards making her accepted in England, or breaking down the barriers of insular prejudice.

The extent of Miss Cushman's popularity may be judged from the fact that her Rosalind was accepted as something very fine. How could she have given the requisite delicacy of touch to this graceful, sunny heroine? Yet one critic said that "Miss Cushman *was* Rosalind." The Rosalinds of Mrs. Nesbit, Madame Vestris, and Helen Faucit were but pictures in water-colours, while that of the American was done "in oils, with such brilliancy of light and shade, with such exquisitely delicious touches of nature and art, with such richness of variety and perfect congruity, that if we did not see

The New Romeo

Shakespeare's '*very Rosalind*,' we never hope or wish to do so." Well! The dramatic reviewer is entitled to his opinion, but the American critic who complained of Miss Cushman's Rosalind as unutterably "heavy" seems to have come nearer the truth. That she did, however, please the English by this performance is an undisputed fact which speaks volumes for one who has been compared, for her tragic genius, to Mrs. Siddons.

But by far the most spectacular, and the boldest, venture of Miss Cushman was made when she figured as Romeo, to the Juliet of her sister Susan, in the very city where Spranger Barry, David Garrick, and Charles Kemble had played the lover. It was at the Haymarket Theatre (December 30, 1845) that she took this leap in the dark (for such it was despite her fair success as Romeo in America), after she had tried the effect on the English during a tour of the provinces. Instead of having the generosity to encourage the sisters, whom they facetiously styled the "two American Indians," the caddish members of the Haymarket company affected much indignation because Charlotte insisted upon acting the tragedy according to the original version. Who were these two savages that they should presume to object to the form in which it was the custom to

present *Romeo and Juliet?* So disagreeable did the company become that Mr. Webster, the manager, warned the members that anyone who refused to follow the instructions of Miss Cushman at rehearsal might consider himself, or herself, forthwith discharged.

The new Romeo

The sequel is familiar. The new Romeo proved the sensation of London; the play ran for eighty nights, and the members of the Haymarket company were turned suddenly, and mysteriously, into the warmest admirers of the daring Yankee. From an artistic standpoint an experiment of this kind is never to be encouraged, whether the Romeo be Cushman or Ellen Tree, or any other fine actress. The mere fact that Romeo *is* Romeo makes it impossible that the character should have the proper illusion and perspective when represented by a woman, be she never so tall or commanding. Sex is something that even genius cannot circumvent. But setting aside the *plausibility* of a feminine Romeo, and looking alone at the histrionic side of the impersonation, apart from the personal side, there is no question as to the effectiveness of Charlotte Cushman. No manner of argument could prevent one from being interested in her Romeo, so well was the lover acted.

"Topmost Passion"

"For a long time," said the London *Times*, "Romeo has been a convention. Miss Cushman's Romeo is a creation; a living, breathing, animated human being. . . . Miss Cushman looks Romeo exceedingly well; her deportment is frank and easy; she walks the stage with an air of command; her eye beams with animation. In a word, Romeo is one of her grand successes."

There must have been, indeed, a decidedly imperious air to this Romeo, just as if he, or she, might prove a very pugnacious fellow if Juliet refused to marry him. But there was Cushmanic fire in the performance, and it was owing, probably, to this characteristic that it appealed so strongly to James Sheridan Knowles. He compared the acting of Romeo in the scene with the Friar to the memorable outburst of Edmund Kean in the third act of *Othello*.

"It was a scene of topmost passion; not simulated passion,—no such thing; real, palpably real; the genuine heart-storm was on,—on in wildest fitfulness of fury; and I listened and gazed and held my breath, while my blood ran hot and cold."

Some years later a certain would-be wit who was watching this Romeo at a Boston theatre

felt his blood run "hot and cold," albeit for a different reason. He gave a sneeze, which he intended to be excruciatingly funny, during one of the romantic scenes between the two stage-lovers. Miss Cushman at once led her Juliet off the stage, and then returned to the footlights with a manly tread, as she cried: "Someone must put that person out, or I shall be obliged to do it myself!" The sneezer was ignominiously expelled, without the promised intervention from the stage, and three cheers were then given for the courageous Montague.

Before the Queen

It was during her first foreign engagement (which extended as far as Dublin) that Miss Cushman acted before the Queen at a benefit given to Macready prior to his departure for America. It was a fitting performance to place before Her Majesty, for the *pièce de résistance*, *Henry VIII.*, had two noble exponents in the Cardinal Wolsey of Macready and the Queen Katherine of the American. Katherine became one of her finest, though not one of her most popular creations, full of queenly womanliness, and distinguished by a death scene which for pathos had no equal. It is curious that she should have made such a strong impression ten years later in the part which Macready played at this benefit. Cardinal Wolsey, Claude Melnotte,

Home Again

and Hamlet were among the male parts to which Cushman gave interest on different occasions. Nor is it to be forgotten that in *The Lady of Lyons* she could play Pauline and the Widow Melnotte (of which latter she was the original in New York), as well as the mawkish hero. That hero, let it be added, was not as mawkish as usual by the time that this actress got through with him.

It was in the summer of 1849 that Charlotte Cushman returned to America unostentatiously so far as she was personally concerned, but very much as a conquering heroine in the eye of a public that was bound to make much of the "Indian" who had been discovered by the British. Those were the days when the stamp of London approval meant far more than it does now, for many Americans had not yet learned to think for themselves in matters theatrical. But in this instance they were more than justified in accepting London's verdict, and if they were blamed for not having found out their countrywoman sooner, they might at least say that she was a more finished actress now than she had been five years before.

Cushman's re-entry in New York was made at the Broadway Theatre (October 8,

Home Again

1849), in *The Stranger*, before an audience that thundered applause upon her, and was also pleased to welcome the actor who played the title-part—an Englishman whom she had brought over to support her. No need to mention C. W. Couldock, who, long afterwards, made his name known from one end of the United States to the other by his delightful portrayal of Dunstan Kirke, one of the least wearisome of "old-school" fathers. Crowded houses now greeted Miss Cushman in the different cities in which she starred, and enjoyed her powerful art as displayed in Lady Macbeth, Meg Merrilies, Romeo, Julia, or in other parts. Then, at the very noonday of her splendour, she bethought herself of retiring from the stage, and actually took what might be called an official leave of it. This was in the spring of 1852. But there would be several more "last farewells" over which wags would wax merry, for acting was to her a mistress who ever called her back to allegiance. The stage was life for Charlotte Cushman.

In the winter of 1853–54, after a trip to England and the Continent, Cushman was acting in London, where a play which an English critic had written for her was hissed into oblivion on its second night. Later she was playing in the provinces; then she

Still at Work

kept house in London, where she made hosts of friends, and in September of 1857 she was again on the American stage. We see her surrounded by such supporters as E. L. Davenport, Mary Devlin (to whose Juliet she once gave her Romeo), John Gilbert, John Brougham, W. R. Blake, and Henry Placide. Within a year she had returned to Europe, to go into another retirement which was made very sad by the death of her sister Susan (Mrs. Muspratt).

The year 1860 found Miss Cushman again treading her native boards. In March of the following season she played Lady Macbeth to the Macbeth of Edwin Booth at a performance given in the New York Academy of Music for the benefit of the American Dramatic Fund. That must have been something to be long remembered, even if the two great "stars" did *not* have the same idea of the title-part. For Booth was not disposed to agree to her assertion that Macbeth was the grandfather of all the Bowery villains. The wonder of it is that she never enforced her own view by playing the Thane herself. Had she done so, the Lady Macbeth of the cast would have become a cypher.

From this time we see Miss Cushman travelling either in the United States or abroad, acting for the benefit of the Sanitary

Grim Disease

Commission, or interesting herself in the artistic affairs of a poor Danish sculptor, and showing herself, whether on or off the stage, the same active, sturdy, respect-compelling woman. Then, from the summer of 1869, she began to suffer from the malady which afterwards caused her death, but which she bore, in all its dreaded stages, with a fortitude that would have done honour to a Spartan. Soon life became a struggle in which the art that she had loved so well aided her spirit by the very exactions it imposed. A physician had advised her to do nothing, "to live well, take care of her general health, amuse herself, and forget her trouble, if possible." Her profession became the amusement that upheld her almost to the end.

Miss Cushman came back to America in the autumn of 1870, never more to return to congenial England, and appeared in the new and attractive guise of a reader of Shakespearian and other works. She was, ere long, back upon the stage. From Boston she writes to a friend, in referring to the enthusiastic claim of her admirers that she was another Mrs. Siddons:

"Of course, it is not displeasing to me to be so considered, but I know better! I dare say I have grown intellectually, and my suffering has

Brilliant Leave-Taking

been sent to me in vain if I have not improved in spirit during all the time I have been away from my profession; but as a mere actress I was as good, if not better, eleven years ago than I am now."

It was on the 7th of November, 1874, that Miss Cushman took her farewell of the New York stage by acting Lady Macbeth at Booth's Theatre, with George Vandenhoff as Macbeth and Frederick Warde as Macduff. But it was not so much the tragedy as the scene which followed that the brilliant audience had come to witness. At the end of the play there was a short interval, and then the curtain rose upon a stage crowded by a distinguished company which included Lester Wallack, Dion Boucicault, Joseph Jefferson, John Gilbert, and William Cullen Bryant. When the actress entered, amid applause that almost shook the house, an ode written in her honour by Richard H. Stoddard was read. Then the venerable Bryant stepped forward, to present her, on behalf of the Arcadian Club, with a crown of laurel.

"What came to your hand in the skeleton form you have clothed with sinews and flesh," he said, "and given it warm blood and a beating heart. Receive, then, the laurel crown, as

Brilliant Leave-Taking

a token of what is conceded to you, as a symbol of the regal state in your profession to which you have risen, and which you so illustriously hold."

There was a passage in the dignified reply of the actress which expressed the moral of her own life, and might appropriately be emblazoned on the walls of every theatre. It was this:

"I found life sadly real and intensely earnest; and in my ignorance of other ways of study, I resolved to take therefrom my text and my watchword; to be thoroughly in earnest, intensely in earnest, in all my thoughts and in all my actions, whether in my profession or out of it, became my one single idea. And I honestly believe herein lies the secret of my success in life. I do not believe that any great success in any art can be achieved without it. I say this to the beginners in my profession, and I am sure all the associates in my art, who have honoured me with their presence on this occasion, will endorse what I say in this. Art is an absolute mistress; she will not be coquetted with or slighted; she requires the most entire self-devotion, and she repays with grand triumphs."

After this regal *adieu* Miss Cushman appeared in other cities, either to read or to act. She was ever planning to leave the

No More Suffering

stage, and was ever loath to do it, as she fought disease and courted the distraction of work. Her last appearance of all as an actress, although not as a reader, was made in Boston, as Lady Macbeth, on the 15th of May, 1875. In the autumn of that year she made her residence in Boston. Here she submitted herself to a new course of medical treatment, and began to hope that she might once again be a well woman. Speaking of the trouble which her illness gave to those she loved, Miss Cushman said: "If ever I get well I will repay them with interest in mirthfulness and joy until they shall wonder at the merry old woman!"

But Charlotte Cushman was doomed. Early in the new year of 1876 she became very weak, then she rallied for a time, and finally caught a bad cold, and passed away on the 18th of February.

"God was very good to us all in the manner of her death," writes her devoted friend and biographer, Emma Stebbins, "whereby the merciful sequence of her hopeful fortitude was never broken down, and we were not called upon to see one moment of weakness in the heroic picture of her last days."

The dead actress was taken to King's

"Our Dead Queen"

Chapel, where children covered the coffin with flowers, and the last service of all was held in Mount Auburn cemetery. It seemed appropriate that children should be near her at the end, for she had always loved them.

When Lawrence Barrett heard of Cushman's death he said that "bigotry itself must stand abashed before the life of our dead queen, whose every thought and act were given for years to an art which ignorance and envy have battled against in vain for centuries." It is strange, and pleasant withal, that she should have sprung from that Puritan race which once regarded a theatre as the plaything of Satan.

'T is beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on:
Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy."

—*Twelfth Night.*

ADELAIDE NEILSON

Poetic Justice

"TO youthful fancy she was the radiant vision of love and pleasure; to grave manhood, the image of all that chivalry should honour and strength protect; to woman, the type of noble goodness and constant affection; to the scholar, a relief from thought and care; to the moralist, a spring of tender pity—that loveliness, however exquisite, must fade and vanish."

Thus fondly has William Winter written of Adelaide Neilson. She deserved such a poetic tribute, if ever actress did. Neilson has left, for the middle-aged theatregoer, a delightful, fragrant memory, while to the dramatic historian of a yet unborn generation her brief career, cut short in the very flower of its perfection, will have the charm of a summer's day romance. Her warm Southern beauty will be forgotten, but she must live in the pages of the chronicler as one of the most fascinating exponents of

Personal Witchery

what is tender and spring-like in Shakespearian womanhood. To Rosalind, Viola, Beatrice, Juliet, Isabella, and the gentle Imogen, she gave a loveliness quite her own, as if to show that the genius of Shakespeare, depending not upon the interpreters of one age or of one method, may live on for centuries, as new souls are born to give it fresh embodiment. To see Miss Neilson in one of these creations was to realise the poet's fidelity to nature — a fidelity which has so triumphed over the flight of time that these heroines are as real now as they were in the days of Elizabeth or James I.

"Ah," cried a playgoer who recalled the vanished face, and heard once more in fancy the melodious voice of this actress, "if Shakespeare could have seen her he would have rued the custom that assigned his feminine parts to boys!" He spoke truly. There may have been greater Shakespearian artistes than Adelaide Neilson, but never one who brought to her willing task more winsomeness and plausibility, or a larger share of personal witchery. The critic who went to see her Rosalind, or her Viola, forgot his scholarly habits of analysis. He saw before him a new creature of the poet's imagination — a perfect woman, lustrous of eye, sinuous of motion, and entrancing of

Adelaide Neilson.

From a photograph.



manner — and he cared little whether or not she threw tradition to the winds. He was once again the same emotional spectator that he had been when a boy.

Spanish Ancestry

The modern actress has, as a rule, not much of the romantic in her private life. She is apt to be a highly prosaic person who takes to the stage as a man may take to law, to physic, or to a clerkship. But in the early history of Adelaide Neilson, otherwise Lizzie Anne Browne, there is something that suggests an Oldfield, an Abington, or a Jordan. Her birth, it is said, occurred in Leeds, England, in March of 1848. Her father, whose full identity is not divulged, appears to have been an actor of Spanish origin who played in an English provincial company, and from whom she inherited both her good looks and the emotional Latin temperament which was afterwards to serve her in such noble stead upon the stage. When Lizzie Anne was five or six years old she was taken by her mother, a one-time provincial actress, and her step-father, a paper-hanger named Bland, to the village of Guiseley, in Yorkshire. Here, if latter-day researches are to be depended upon, as no doubt they are, the child aided her mother in caring for the step-brothers and sisters of the household, or occasionally went out

Early Longings

with Bland (when he papered the rooms of a neighbour), or worked, at intervals, as a "filler" in a near-by factory. But even amid all this drudgery she found time to read Shakespeare, from her mother's old prompt books, as she gradually developed her inherited taste for the drama. Laura C. Holloway tells us, in her *Souvenir* of the actress, that Lizzie Anne could, at the age of eight years, repeat long extracts from the poet's works, and intelligently act several of his feminine characters. Sometimes she would give performances with none but her dolls for audience, while she would often lie in bed reading until her mother entered the room and extinguished her aspirations, and the light, at the same moment. She moved in a world of Rosalinds and Orlandos, of Portias, Shylocks, and Juliets, when she could snatch a few minutes from factory or home duties, and she liked nothing better than to see the wretched performances with which a company of barnstormers would occasionally favour the yokels of Guiseley.

Her education must have been primitive, to say the least, but she was sent, for a time, to the parochial school, where she showed an unusual aptitude for study and vast talent for reciting verse. Lizzie Anne was already growing into a beautiful girl, much

admired by the local swains, but no one, save possibly her mother, dreamed that she was fired with an ambition for the stage. Early Longings

"If I were an actress this is the way I should play this scene!" she once cried to the members of a family whom she was visiting, as she threw down the play she had been reading, went through the throes of a tragic part, and then fell upon the sofa in an apparent faint. Her listeners, deceived by the realism, sprang forward to resuscitate the unconscious Thespian. To their amazement, she sprang from the sofa, and burst into a peal of mocking laughter.

At the age of fifteen Lizzie Anne was serving as a nursery-maid in the family of a lady who resided near the Blands. But as the months went on she grew restless, and one fine day she ran away to London. When she reached the great city she was penniless, friendless, without prospects, and without a soul to whom she might turn in her need. All that day she walked the streets, until, quite hungry and footsore, she sat down upon a bench in Hyde Park and fell asleep. From such a sleep many a wanderer has waked only to find starvation, or worse, for the sequel. But there was a lucky star shining above her head during that warm night. Early in the morning a

A Lucky Star

policeman found the child, for she was little more, and took her home to his wife. That kind-hearted woman gave her food and shelter until she was able to earn a few shillings a week as a seamstress — just as Anne Oldfield had once earned money by the same occupation, in the same town.

It was a grim life of poverty, unredeemed by any gleam of sunshine, which the pretty Yorkshire lass led for some months. We hear of her, indeed, serving behind the bar of a public-house in the Haymarket, and making a reputation for herself as a declaimer of Shakespeare. At last the dramatic fire that was in her asserted itself, albeit in an humble way. She went on the stage as a ballet-girl. But it soon became apparent that there was more in this handsome *danseuse* than grace and agility of limb. John Ryder, the friend of Macready, took an interest in her, taught her the rudiments of acting, and corrected her Yorkshire accent. It was a golden opportunity, of which the ex-nursery-maid took full advantage. She studied day and night, learned several languages, and came out of the ordeal as only a woman of rare talent and unusually intelligent mind could have done. The marks of Lizzie Anne Browne, or Bland, had vanished before the new accomplishments

As Juliet

of Miss Lillian Adelaide Lessont, afterwards to delight English and American audiences as Adelaide Neilson. It was about this time that she married Mr. Philip Henry Lee, the son of a Northamptonshire clergyman, from whom she was divorced some years later.

It was in the spring of 1865 that the trembling *débutante* played Julia in *The Hunchback*, at Margate. In July she appeared as Juliet at the Royalty Theatre, London, before a scant house which included several critics who were impressed and surprised by the beauty of the novice and the tragic promise of her performance. Undoubtedly her Juliet lacked the finish and grace that it possessed in later seasons, but there was no gainsaying its pristine effectiveness. And what an ideal heroine to gaze at! The shapely figure, the great luminous eyes, the mouth half-arch, half-pensive, the rich brown hair shading the Spanish complexion, all realised that picture of youth without which the most inspired Juliet — who often best acts the part when she is too old to look it — has something wanting. Besides the pleasure which this Juliet gave the eye, there was a joy in listening to her marvellous voice. It could be caressing, passionate, or merry, by turns, and was ever full of a melody by no means English.

Abundant Praise

It was not long before success came to Miss Neilson in abundant measure, as she went on developing her natural resources, and added to her repertoire such parts, among others, as Rosalind, Pauline, Victorine, in the drama of that title, Nelly Armroyd, in *Lost in London*, and Lilian, in Westland Marston's drama of *Life for Life*. After the performance of the last-named play, at the London Lyceum (March, 1869), the critic of the *Athenæum* found some fault with the minor details of her acting, but warmly praised it as a whole. "Practice and care," he said, "are alone required to secure for Miss Neilson a high and enduring reputation." When, a year and a half later, Miss Neilson played Amy Robsart, in a dramatisation of *Kenilworth*, it was evident that she had become a public idol who justified the height of the pedestal on which she now stood.

"Her passionate appeals to the truth and honour of Leicester," as one reviewer glowingly pointed out, "were finely contrasted with the tenderness of her love passages. In the great scene with the jealous and suspicious Queen, in the garden at Kenilworth, her acting rose to a higher level of pathetic force; and finally her struggles with Varney, and her womanish terror at the prospect of death, were depicted with an

intensity which powerfully excited the feelings of the audience."

Mother and Daughter

It was during a provincial tour that the actress met the mother who had not seen her, or heard of her, since the day when Lizzie Anne shook from her pretty feet the dust of Guiseley. Mrs. Bland read in the newspapers that a certain "Miss Neilson," of whom the theatrical world had been talking, was about to play in Leeds. It flashed upon her, perhaps from some chance clue or description, that this might be her missing child. So she went to Leeds, called at the hotel where the "star" was stopping, sent up the name of Mrs. Bland, and was promptly invited to walk up-stairs. When she entered the room of Miss Neilson she found in the handsomely dressed woman none other than the daughter who used to help her in the care of all the little Blands, or who worked in the factory. It was a cordial meeting — one could expect neither more nor less—and the mother exacted from Adelaide, late Lizzie Anne, a promise to visit her in Guiseley. To that village the actress went, later on, to create a furore that has not yet been forgotten. People stared at her as if she had been a wild beast, as they admired her gowns and contrasted the difference between

Old Friends

her old life and the new: when she went to the church which she had attended as a little girl the parishioners stood upon the seats that they might have the better look at their old friend. So much attention became a trifle disconcerting, even to one who had received public adulation, but Adelaide Neilson was not the kind to play the snob. She had a warm greeting for everyone, although the notoriety given to this return greatly annoyed her. On Mrs. Bland, who was now a widow, she settled an income for life.

As Miss Neilson prospered in her profession, she was not content to rest on the laurels she had won. She worked hard, and bestowed on Juliet, which became her masterpiece, long and conscientious study. During one of her revivals of the part, just before her departure for this country, it was generally agreed that her performance, which had gained materially in finish and in theatric power, was one of the finest pieces of acting known to the English stage. Her American experiences, beginning in the autumn of 1872, were a series of triumphs, for the New World fell head over heels in love with this young woman who brought it new and delightful interpretations of Juliet, Beatrice, Isabella, Pauline, Julia, and Lady Teazle. Three times did she return to

A Poet's Homage

America, and three times was she welcomed with enthusiasm. Once, on her playing Juliet in Boston, the poet Longfellow wrote to her: "I have never in my life seen intellectual and poetical feeling more exquisitely combined." What was more, he sent her some verses which she had inspired, while he asked that she would not make them public. It was worth a journey across the ocean to receive such homage.

Miss Neilson's last engagement in the United States ended in May of 1880. As she bade farewell to her New York admirers, at her benefit at Booth's Theatre, she said, in unconscious prophecy: "It seems to me that I am leaving not only friends but happiness itself; that the skies can never again be as bright as they have been to me here, nor flowers bloom as beautifully, nor music sound as sweetly any more!" Yet she was glad that the engagement was over; for she was tired from the strain of constant travel, and looked forward eagerly to a period of rest and retirement.

After her arrival in England Miss Neilson complained that she was far from well, and she seemed to have a presentiment that she would not live long. Indeed, when she said good-bye to several of her intimate friends, as she was about to go to Paris to recuperate,

The Last Journey

she declared that she should never return. But she looked the picture of health, and no one dreamed that she spoke truth, like unto some Scotch sibyl endowed with the gift of "second sight." On August 15th of 1880, she was in Paris, driving with a companion through the Bois de Boulogne. Feeling faint from the intense heat, she stopped the carriage, to drink a glass of iced milk. Shortly after this she was seized with terrible neuralgic or gastric cramps, was removed quickly from the carriage, and carried into the Châlet restaurant. Here everything possible was done to restore her, but without avail. In twelve hours Adelaide Neilson was dead, in the very prime of her career, at the age of thirty-two.

They took her body to England, and one bright, sunny morning (as Laura Holloway says prettily),

"when the birds were singing in every tree and hedge, they laid it away at Brompton, in the presence of many friends who had followed it to its resting place. Over the grave had been spread a covering of royal purple velvet, and in this cloth of kings they laid the flower-laden oaken coffin; wreaths of lilies were placed upon it, and the dead Juliet was entwined in blossoms. Then, as the casket was lowered to its last resting place, those who stood about the open grave

The Last Journey

drew nigh with their offerings, and in a few moments the lovely woman was buried, not in the cold earth, but in a bed of flowers whose fragrance filled the air."

The friends about the grave mourned the lovable, impulsive, generous woman, who knew neither jealousy nor littleness. Thousands of theatregoers who were not there mourned the great actress. All that is mortal of her over whom artists raved and eloquent critics rhapsodised is now covered by a large cross of white marble, inscribed with her name and date of death, and the words:

GIFTED AND BEAUTIFUL.

RESTING.

Perhaps it was well for her fame that Adelaide Neilson died when she did. She had given of her best to the public; she had reached the summer of her beauty, and possibly the finest level of her fascinating art; and she had left behind her an enchanting memory. Had she lived beauty, like some provoking, disappearing syren, must have flown, as the seasons sped onward, fickle audiences might have turned to other and younger favourites, and criticism of her acting might have resolved itself into the complaint that "Neilson is not what she was." How often do we hear, or even make

A Cruel Verdict

ourselves, some such remark about a player who once fired our early enthusiasm, but who, since then, has been unkind enough to grow old. When we begin to detect, through the paint, the wrinkles near the eyes, the lines about the mouth, or perhaps the telltale spears of grey hair, we have the sense of personal grievance. *We* may have crow's-feet, but what right has Rosalind, or Viola, to put on the marks of age? "Let her take to old women's parts," we say, as we stalk out of the theatre without thinking of the happy moments we used to pass in looking at the same actress. 'T is a cruel verdict, but it is often the reward of the faithful player who lags too long upon the scene.

When an actress has been dead for twenty years, as has Adelaide Neilson, the test of her art is to be found in the character by which she is most vividly recalled to the mind's eye of the seasoned playgoer. It may be said, without fear of contradiction, that this character, in the case of Miss Neilson, is Juliet. Hers was a human Juliet, throbbing with life and love — not an academic exhibition of skilful acting — and although the art was there, sound and true, one forgot its very existence. We were charmed in the earlier, lighter scenes, even as we detected a tragic undercurrent which

presaged the coming storm, while in the later scenes we sat thrilled by the sudden histrionic power, without pausing to think of the strings which the accomplished actress was working. It was Juliet, not Neilson, who stood before us, passionate, pathetic, sublime; and on leaving the theatre we felt as if we had been mutely watching the tragedy of our own *inamorata*. For all of us, young and old, youths, and white-haired, married men, were her lovers from the rising of the curtain until the last sound of the orchestra, as it played us out of the house, sounded in our ears. As for Romeo — he became a cypher whom it would have taken Spranger Barry, and no one a jot less ardent, to bring back into prominence under such circumstances. Well might the critical Joseph Knight say that this Juliet was perfection; well, and poetically, might Winter write that "golden fire in a porcelain vase would not be more luminous than was the soul of that actress as it shone through her ideal of Juliet." In look, voice, and hidden nature, Neilson *was* Juliet.

But from the high-wrought emotions of Capulet's daughter it was sometimes almost a relief to pass to the gentler, less sorrowful moods of Rosalind. Since Neilson first played the latter part in this country we

Truth and Beauty

Americans have seen several delightful Rosalinds, but none of them can obliterate the impression which she made as she prattled her way through the forest of Arden. There was a buoyancy, an archness, and a vein of womanly feeling withal, that gave to her Rosalind a distinction quite its own. If we could take the refined, intelligent Rosalind of Modjeska, the exuberant Rosalind of Ada Rehan, and the sweet Rosalind of Julia Marlowe, roll them all into one, and add the rare personal piquancy of the Englishwoman, we might then give an idea of what this actress was in *As You Like It*.

"It was not alone the glamour of youth, beauty, and classic grace," says Mr. L. Clarke Davis, "which filled the spectator's mind with pleasurable emotion, but, adding to the charm of the character and the completeness of the author's triumph, were the intelligence to recognise the subtle wit, the delicate refinement, and the masterful power to portray them all. In the more tender and emotional passages of the play her quiet pathos appealed irresistibly to every heart; for, underlying all she did, there was a wondrous sweetness of womanly dignity and an adherence to nature which rendered the performance altogether worthy of her fame." *

* Mr. Wingate gives an appreciative estimate of Miss Neilson in his *Shakespeare's Heroines on the Stage*.

Truth and Beauty

In *Measure for Measure*, as Isabella, and in *Twelfth Night* and *Cymbeline* Miss Neilson gave us varying pictures of feminine purity which dignified alike the actress, Shakespeare, and womankind at large. Her Viola was tender, fanciful, playful, pathetic, what you will, and charming in every mood; her Isabella proved a thing of earnestness and nobility, and her Imogen seemed to realise the description of the character which Mr. Wingate quotes a later actress as giving —a heroine possessing "every quality which makes woman adorable,— youth, beauty, purity, femininity in its finest sense, and a touching, never-swerving loyalty."

Every prominent player is a target for the carper who sees nothing good in the world. Adelaide Neilson did not escape this type of cheap criticism. It was said, in this quarter, that she had no originality; that she was little more than a fine-looking woman who played her parts as she had been instructed to do, and that she won fame by a systematic course of "puffing." To listen to these cynics it might have been supposed that the actress was a pretty puppet. They were never pleased with anything that passed before them on the stage. To them Cushman had no imagination, Edwin Booth was but the son of his father, and Lord Dundreary

More than Charming

but a boresome idiot. Had they lived a hundred years before they did, they would have contended that Garrick was too short of stature to act well, and that Mrs. Abington had no talents.

Adelaide Neilson was more than a bewitching woman. To the field which she trod so gracefully — the field of youthful romance — she brought not only intelligent study, but, greater still, that intuitive sympathy which is genius. The impression which she left upon the spectator was as sweet and healthy as a May morning. It is pleasant to think of her, after all these years, as we contrast her with several players of to-day, who deal in men and women with a "past," in skeletons in family cupboards, or in exhibitions more fit for the dissecting-room or the charnal-house than for the stage. There was nothing morbid, or distorted, in the art of this vanished star.

"She was a form of life and light
That seen, became a part of sight,
And rose, where'er I turned mine eye,
The morning star of memory!"

' It is the glory and good of Art
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth,— to mouths like mine, at least.''

—*Browning.*



RISTORI

A Distinct "Hit"

IT seems a curious chance of genius that Adelaide Ristori, who gave such vivid effectiveness to three British heroines—Lady Macbeth, Mary Stuart, and Queen Elizabeth—should have been an Italian of the Italians. For she was born in Venetia, during the year 1821, nor was it until she was over fifty that she began the study of English. But her dramatic apprenticeship commenced early. Before she was three months old her parents, who were themselves players, had cast her for a very juvenile *rôle* in a farce entitled *The New Year's Gift*. It is a matter of history that she made a distinct "hit" by crying so lustily, when she was produced from a basket filled with eggs, fowls, fruit, and herself, that the audience went into shrieks of laughter. For the moment she quite threw all the other performers into the background, just as she was destined to do on

Quite in Earnest

later occasions. Finally the child was removed from the stage to the arms of her mother, and the farce then proceeded according to programme.

When Adelaide was about three years old she played the part of a boy who must be seized roughly by the villain of the piece, in an attempt at abduction. No sooner had the wicked knight grasped the little one, as in duty bound, than she, taking the scene to be in earnest, began to fight her captor, to pull his beard, and to scratch his face. This sudden onslaught was too much for the surprised villain, who let Adelaide drop from his arms, as she ran off the stage, and then positively refused to return.

But this *contretemps* did not interrupt the child's theatrical career. On the contrary, she was soon acting in little farces, and threatening to degenerate into a species of infant phenomenon. At twelve she was doing soubrettes; at thirteen she played "second ladies," and on reaching the age of fourteen she joined the company of the celebrated actor-manager, Signor Moncalvo. Two years later Adelaide, who had mastered a vast amount of technique, and shown unusual talent, was offered the post of leading woman in the company. Had she accepted it, her fame might never have extended

Ristori.

From an old print.



The Right Training

beyond her own province. A short-lived reputation as a prodigy—and then broken health, an art unduly forced, and therefore anæmic, and, as a result, oblivion. That would have been the end. The girl's father had the good sense to see the folly of all this, for he refused to let her accept the offer, and placed her, as an *ingénue*, in the company which played before the King of Sardinia. Amid these more normal surroundings the young Ristori studied her art with a new enthusiasm and intelligence, as she assumed a variety of parts, grave and gay. She began to understand how much even one who has been reared before the footlights has to learn, before she can emerge into the finished artiste. It became one of her pleasures to study tragic characters, and to observe how the opposite traits or moods in the same part might have harmonious blending. Otherwise she was an impressionable, vivacious girl, who loved to play tricks on her fellow-actors, or who, by way of change, would roam through a graveyard reading the melancholy inscriptions on the tombstones. If this occupation was not sufficiently pleasurable, she would visit an insane asylum, to note the madness of the most harmless among the inmates. As the actress grew in years, and put aside any taste for

A happy quality

lugubriousness in private life, these visits to the dead, and to the living-dead, gradually ceased.

On one thing Ristori was resolved. She would never slight her audience, be it large or small, intelligent, or the reverse. She would always act on the presumption that there was at least one cultivated spectator present who could appreciate her work. This earnestness became, in after years, one of the secrets of her wonderful success. Ristori also resolved, as she tells us in her entertaining *Studies and Memoirs*, that she would combine the naturalness of the new French school, then coming into vogue, with the intensity and the fire of the Italian method. Here, too, we have another explanation of the striking impressions which she produced in later seasons. Her realism never degenerated into mere imitative excellence; her passion never became bombast. What was grand and dramatic seemed likewise natural and plausible. It was the same happy quality, or combination, which marked the style of Garrick.

But now Ristori, who was personating the romance of fictitious people, had one of her own. She married the Marquis del Grillo, and began to look forward to a quiet domestic life and retirement from the stage.

On to Paris

It appeared as if the whole current of her life was to be changed. But the wife was fired by one ambition. She, who had already held native audiences spellbound, burned to show those of foreign lands that Italy, her own country, could still hold up her head in the world of art. Then she might retire.

It was in 1855, after Ristori had established her reputation in Italy on a firm basis, that the chance finally arrived. Why not take the Royal Sardinian company, of which she was the leading woman, to capture the Parisians? No sooner had this bold idea suggested itself to her than she spoke of it to her husband. The Marquis approved, but when it was broached to Righetti, the manager, he held up his hands in horror. The scheme, contended the latter, was wild, chimerical, and sure to entail artistic and financial failure. However, the scruples of Righetti were overcome by promises of monetary assistance, and, in May of 1855, the company travelled to Paris.

A great discouragement seized Ristori on the first evening she spent in the French capital, as she sat, with her husband, outside a popular café, and watched the crowds of *boulevardiers*. What, forsooth, would these strangers care for her acting, in a foreign

On to Paris

tongue, unknown to them as she was? She walked home with the Marquis, not speaking a single word, and passed a wretched night as visions of ghastly failure loomed up in quick succession. The next day, however, she was busily preparing for her *début*, which was to take place in a few days, and incidentally planning a visit to the Comédie Française, of which she had heard so much. Rachel was out of town, but she would see Mlle. Brohan play in *Le Caprice*. And she did see the latter, too, but from the gallery of the house of Molière. When she and her party applied that evening for a box they found that the boxes, and the seats downstairs, had all been sold. It was a place among the "gods," or nothing—and to the "gods" they ascended. It was a curious introduction to the Comédie for one who was to rival, and dethrone, the greatest ornament of that theatre.

Soon all Paris was talking about the newcomer who was playing within its gates. Dumas, the elder, who became one of her most devoted admirers, Théophile Gautier, Jules Janin, and other critics extolled her dramatic virtues, while not a few rushed to the rescue of the threatened Rachel, and insisted that the Italian actress lacked all the great qualities of her rival.

"I never had the presumption," said Ristori, "to come to Paris to compete with your sublime artiste. My aim is a more modest one, and a more generous one. I wish to show that in Italy also the dramatic art, once our boast and our glory, still exists, and is cultivated with affection and passion."

Ristori could afford to take matters calmly. Paris had already begun to worship at her shrine. After she had played one of her favourite parts (the Myrrha of Alfieri) with a force and realism that proved electric, Dumas kissed the hem of her mantle—he never forgot that Rachel had rejected several of his plays—and Janin, Legouvé (who was thinking of the spurned *Medea*), Gautier, Scribe, and other keen judges of acting could hardly find words to express their admiration. The audience was in an uproar of delight.

In the midst of these sudden triumphs Ristori was told that Rachel, the formidable, was coming to see her play in the *Burbero Benefico* of Goldoni. The Italian was greatly annoyed. *Burbero Benefico* was not the comedy—for she did not disdain the lighter repertoire—to show her off to best advantage. It was such a provoking selection. Why had not the Frenchwoman chosen to see her as Myrrha, Francesca da Rimini, or Mary

Rachel, the Rival

Stuart? But it appears that when Rachel did finally come to the theatre, it was to see Ristori's Myrhra.

In the meantime injudicious critics, kind friends, and mischief-makers, were doing all they could to cause a breach between the two actresses. Gladly would Ristori have held out the olive-branch, but she had been warned that Rachel, who was incensed at her success, might not accept it. Finally a certain fashionable dressmaker, who made the gowns for the Empress Eugénie, called upon Ristori, bringing with her an air of inscrutable mystery. This modiste explained that Rachel had been much hurt by the attacks which some of the French critics had made upon her, while they used Ristori as a pretext for her humiliation. What was more, Rachel had heard that Ristori had spoken of her in terms of contempt.

"That is not true," cried Ristori, "and I hope Mlle. Rachel has not given any more belief to those mischievous insinuations than I did when I heard some very unkind criticism she was reported to have uttered about me!" She went on to say that she had generously applauded her rival's acting as Camille, and had commissioned mutual friends to make known to Rachel her admiration, and her desire to

meet the Frenchwoman, but that there had been no response. Then the dressmaker intimated that Rachel would like to meet the Italian. Would Ristori accept from Rachel a box at the Française? Nothing, replied Ristori, would give her greater pleasure. The next day there came a box ticket for the Comédie, and a note bearing the short but pacific legend, "*À Madame Ristori, sa camarade Rachel.*" In the evening Ristori went to see Rachel as Phèdre, a part which she had herself played and carefully studied. In the fourth act the critical spectator was filled with the most generous enthusiasm and applauded liberally, to the great edification of the audience, which watched her almost as intently as it did the actress who was on the stage. When the curtain fell Ristori wrote a few words of congratulation on a visiting-card, which she sent behind the scenes to Rachel. But the two great artistes never met in private. Soon Rachel was on her way to America, as she recalled, with a sore heart, the favour which her fickle public had bestowed upon the newcomer from Sardinia. To Paris the Rachel–Ristori controversy had been a source of tremendous interest — and those who can interest Paris may be classed as philanthropists.

Unstinted Applause

Admiring Parisians

In some quarters the departure of Rachel for America was looked upon as an unpatriotic move, and not a few Frenchmen were anxious that Ristori should make her permanent home in Paris, that she might fill the niche left vacant by the flight of their former idol. It is said, indeed, that Napoleon III. would have been well pleased had the Italian consented to fit herself for the exploiting of the classic French drama. As for Dumas, he would have been delighted had she stayed among his countrymen. Prince of gourmands that he was, he once boasted to Ristori that he could cook maccaroni as well as the finest *chef* in Naples, and he actually donned a white cap, jacket, and apron, as he seized a saucepan and proceeded to put his boast — not an empty one, we may be sure—to the test. Once he met a friend whom he chided for not having gone to see Ristori. The friend hinted that the six francs necessary for that pleasure were not to be procured as easily as the novelist supposed. Dumas offered to lend the man six francs. The friend indignantly declined the money. .Whereupon Dumas pulled out his purse, placed six francs in the street, and walked away. The friend started off in an opposite direction. Later on it occurred to each that it was the height of

foolishness to leave money exposed for the first person who would come along to pocket it. Each turned back, and the two met face to face. There was a burst of laughter—and the friend ended by seeing Ristori.

There were many other examples of the popularity of the new "star." After Clésinger, a famous sculptor, had witnessed one of her performances he cried in delight: "I will break the statue of Tragedy I have made, for Ristori has taught me that it was but the statue of Melodrama!" The statue of Tragedy which he threatened to demolish, and perhaps did not, had Rachel for its model. But Ristori resisted these blandishments. She was, and ever remained, a patriotic Italian, just as Rachel, despite her trip to the United States, ever remained a Frenchwoman. It is pleasant to see this devotion to country in anyone, whether he or she be American, English, French, or anything else, and we sympathise with Mr. Gilbert's hero who

"—— might have been a Roosian,
A Frenchman, Turk, or Proosian,
Or perhaps Italian:
But in spite of all temptations,
To belong to other nations,
He remains an Englishman."

Mighty Medea

After leaving Paris Ristori, no longer anxious to retire, played successfully in Dresden, Berlin, and other cities, then returned to her beloved Italy, and afterwards appeared in Vienna. In the spring of 1856 she came back to Paris to figure in Legouvé's tragedy of *Medea*, which poor Rachel had refused, so provokingly, to act. Medea proved one of Ristori's finest *rôles*. Yet it must not be forgotten that the character had at first repelled her, as it had done Rachel, although for different reasons. Ristori was passionately fond of children, whether they were her own or other people's, and the very idea of Medea, as of a mother who murdered her own offspring, filled her with loathing. When Legouvé had broached the subject of his play to her she had frankly expressed her dislike to his antique heroine, and had only promised to read his version of the story as an act of politeness. The day following her interview with the author Ristori glanced idly over the manuscript, as her maid brushed her long hair. At the end of the first act she exclaimed: "It is beautiful!" At the close of the second act she was in raptures. When she finally came to the scene in which Medea, fearing that her children will be torn from her, leaps on the altar of Saturn and takes their young lives,

Mighty Medea

the actress let the book drop from her hands. It was now her one ambition to play the mother. The dramatic effect had overcome all her objections. And, what was equally potent, there seemed to be an excuse for the murder. When Legouvé put in an appearance Ristori overwhelmed him with praise. His skill had conquered that strongest of feelings — feminine prejudice. "I shall be delighted," she cried, "to be your Medea!"

On the night of production artistic Paris was in a state of excitement. The theatre was crowded with an audience eager to see the play which Rachel had refused and Ristori had accepted. The latter was shivering from head to foot. Her hands were like ice. But she overcame her nervousness, and gave, as the distracted heroine, such a picture of hatred, jealousy, love, and despair, that the house "rose at her" — as Edmund Kean would have said.

The children in the tragedy sometimes proved a source of much annoyance to Ristori. One evening — she does not tell us if the incident occurred in Paris or elsewhere —as Medea threw the two little ones on the steps of the altar of Saturn, and was supposed to kill them, one of the youngsters suddenly began to scream with fright, after the breath had presumably left his body,

Another Lady Macbeth

and ran behind the scenes, before the bereaved mother could do anything to prevent this ignominious retreat. Of course the illusion was spoiled, and the house went off into a paroxysm of laughter. Truly the player who has to do with small children on the stage takes her reputation in her hands.*

On her first engagement in London, during the summer of 1856, Ristori was urged to try Lady Macbeth. On her return there, a year later, she appeared in an Italian translation of the tragedy, much to the satisfaction of the English, and entered so fully into the spirit of the sleep-walking scene, by keeping her eyes immovable in their sockets, that she permanently weakened her sight. Lady Macbeth was at first a most difficult study for the actress, but her own genius responded to the sturdy demands of the character, and it became, as we all know, one of the grandest and most massive manifestations of her art. Hers was an essentially masculine Lady Macbeth. That is to say, it was masculine in disposition, though not in manner or outward guise. After long and patient examination she came

* One of the finest portrayals of Medea can be credited to Madame Janauschek, who played the part some years ago with a tragic intensity that those who were privileged to see it will never forget.

Another Lady Macbeth

to the conclusion that the woman was animated less by affection for Macbeth than by inordinate ambition to share with him a tempting throne. The theory that Lady Macbeth was a creature of "turbulent" and "inhuman" strength of spirit, who made a mere weak tool of her husband, forcibly appealed to Ristori, and it was on that plane that she interpreted the part. All of us who recall it must admit that it formed one of the great pictures of the contemporary stage, whether or not we agree with the reading, or would be disposed to allow Lady Macbeth a trifle more of latent conscience. It was the most unscrupulous of all our Lady Macbeths, and while we almost despised the character, for its rank callousness, we were lost in admiration for the actress. There could be no doubt of the magnificence of the performance, which showed that Ristori was sincere when she said that Lady Macbeth was one of the most remarkable personages ever conceived by human mind.

During an engagement which she played, two years later, in Naples, Ristori nearly lost her life through an excess of emotion that caused her to forget herself in the passionate scenes of *Phèdre*. In the fourth act, where the heroine bursts into a fit of

Saved from Death

jealous rage, the actress was so carried away by the illusion of the moment that she fell on the footlights, instead of retreating up the stage, as she should have done. The spectators cried out in alarm, as many of them rose to their feet. At the same instant a young man who sat directly under the stage jumped up and saved Ristori from a frightful death by fire, by pushing her away from the lights. As it was, she was badly cut in the right arm by the glass of the lamps. No sooner had the accident occurred than a brother of King Ferdinand came rushing on the stage with the court doctor, to dress her wound. The miserable superstition that prevailed in Italy in those days may be imagined from the fact that her mishap was attributed to the presence in the audience of some unfortunate possessed of the "evil eye." For two months Ristori carried her arm in a sling, but she contrived to fill all her engagements.*

It was in Madrid, soon after this episode, that Ristori, during an *entre-acte*, threw

* Superstition was carried to such absurd lengths in Italy, in the old days, that actors who played in Rome were forbidden by the censor to use the words God, Devil, or Angel. Such are the idiocies of a censorship. And yet some good Americans are crying out for a censorship of plays. Our censor would, no doubt, be a politician who had never heard of Shakespeare.

herself at the feet of the Queen of Spain, and secured the pardon of a poor soldier who had been condemned to death. Well might Her Majesty say that two different tragedies were being played that night. She was a superb actress, without doubt, who could play the two parts, and acquit herself so admirably in each. This double life of a player, who never forgets either his own individuality or that of the character he essays, is one of the mysterious wonders of the stage. During her subsequent visits to Madrid the soldier who had escaped death, as if by a miracle, used to sit in the theatre and cry out, "*Vive* Ristori!" until the people around him thought the man must be a lunatic. He had had, indeed, a narrow escape, for he was receiving the last sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church when messengers rushed into the chapel to announce his pardon.

Two Tragedies

For a number of years Ristori played the globe-trotter as well as she played her parts. Many lands were visited. In Amsterdam she was the heroine of a parade of which the King of Holland observed that it was "too little for a revolution, and too big for a demonstration"; at Utrecht she was met at the station by almost all the town; and at Coimbra, in Portugal, the professors and

Foreign Adulation

students of the local university received her with the honours of a conqueror. The students volunteered to appear as classic maidens in the play of *Medea* — and kept their word. After they had dressed for their parts some of them went into a front box to watch the first act, as they smoked long cigars, in grotesque indifference to their feminine costumes. Ristori almost lost her gravity when she suddenly looked up, and saw her "supers" calmly surveying the performance, nor was it until they withdrew from the box that she could again forget herself in the woes of Medea.

From the time that Legouvé first met Ristori it had been his ambition that she should learn to act in French. On her return to Paris, in the spring of 1860, he began to lead up to this pet scheme by asking her to recite some verses of his own, at a performance to be given at the Comédie Française for the benefit of Mademoiselle Trochu, the granddaughter of Racine. The actress at first answered "No!" most emphatically. To wrestle with the delicate subtleties of a new tongue before so critical an audience was something not to be thought of for a second! But Legouvé was not a man to be denied. He induced her to recite a poem in French, as the two of them were



RISTORI.

FROM AN OLD PRINT.

alone in a room, while several curious friends waited outside to know the result. So brilliantly did Ristori come out of the ordeal that Legouvé threw open wide the door, as he cried to the friends: "The country is saved!" The result was that she astonished the audience at the Comédie, which included the exacting members of the company, by the fluency with which she gave the dramatist's verses in their native beauty.

Acting in French

Legouvé, like the diplomat he was, now persuaded Ristori that if she wished to thank the French public for all its kindness towards her, she could best do it by playing before it in the French tongue. He had written a little play for that purpose—something that would exactly suit the actress if she should deign to look over it. She did deign to look over it, and found that the character intended for her was, adroitly enough, that of an Italian player (Beatrix) who might be allowed, from her nationality, to speak French with a slight accent. The story itself interested Ristori greatly. Beatrix loved, and was loved by, a young prince who determined to marry her, despite the difference in their rank of life. But she, fearing to bring sorrow to the prince's mother, who had been very kind to her, sacrificed her own feelings, and

Acting in French

conveniently disappeared. There was a quiet heroism in the character that appealed to Ristori. She set to work at once to study Beatrix, while Legouvé followed after her on a trip up the Rhine, that he might help her to banish from her French pronunciation, or to soften down, the rolling of the Italian *r*, which came to her by nature.

In March of the following year, after triumphal visits to St. Petersburg and Moscow, Ristori came back to Paris to play Beatrix at the Odéon. The more she studied the *rôle* the more she admired it, until at last it seemed part of herself. She even forgot, at rehearsals, that she was speaking in a foreign tongue. On the night of the first performance she felt so free from nervousness, so sure of herself, that she laughed when her fellow-players besought her to "have no fear." Fear! How absurd! The next minute she was on the stage and — presto! — all her confidence suddenly vanished. The theatre was crowded. But the size of the house, and the burst of applause which greeted her, only dismayed her the more. All these spectators were assembled to hear an Italian talk French! And if she failed? But she screwed her courage up to the linguistic point, and made such a fine Beatrix that Legouvé's play ran for forty nights.

Constant Study

Throughout all of Ristori's career we have evidences of her constant study and perseverance. Some of the grandest effects of her acting were the result of the most careful thought, and of much burning of the midnight oil. She never trusted alone to her marvellous genius; no detail was too small, no point too trivial, for her consideration; she was always observing, reasoning, comparing. When she went to Athens, and stood entranced before the Caryatides, she studied the Grecian drapery, that she might reproduce every line of the beautiful folds. It was this attention to the world about her that made Ristori great, just as the same gift, in a larger form, made Shakespeare great.

What a triple example of this combination of work and inspiration must have been furnished on the occasion when Ristori, Ernesto Rossi, and Tommaso Salvini played together in Florence (1865), during the ceremonies attending the sixth centenary of the birth of Dante! The drama was *Francesca da Rimini*, with Ristori as Francesca, Rossi as Paolo, and Salvini as Lanciotto. It showed a triumvirate of great artists hampered by no academic "schools." Their "school," if they had one, was nature's alone.

Speaking, in his *Autobiography*, of this historic performance, Salvini says:

Salvini's Memories

"Adelaide Ristori did not fall behind her world-wide fame; Ernesto Rossi surpassed himself, and that is not saying little; Lorenzo Piccinini (Guido) was acclaimed; and they say that my success was a revelation. The betrayed husband of Francesca had had until then interpreters who had not brought out the loftiness of that generous, loyal, and loving nature; he had generally been conceived as a stern, tyrannical, and vindictive husband, and the character had been played by artists accustomed to depict the most revolting characters. I made him an affectionate husband, worthy of pity in his misfortune, and torn by anguish in the just recriminations which he hurls at the guilty pair, and the public felt sympathy with the afflicted husband and betrayed prince, and disapproval, blame, and condemnation for his betrayers. . . . At the end of the third act Adelaide Ristori gave me a kiss of admiration. At the end of the fourth the public, which by etiquette had been constrained to silence, called my companions and me many times before the curtain, and, when the tragedy was completed, it seemed as though the ovation would never stop, and we were obliged to repeat the play on the following night to content those who had not been able to obtain tickets for the first night."

Salvini had first played with Ristori as far back as 1847, when he was a young and unknown actor who used to study four or five

new parts every week. At six o'clock every morning he would pass through one of the gates of Sienna, reading the *rôle* which he was to play the same evening, and would walk miles into the country as he conned the lines. When the hour of rehearsal came he was back in Sienna with every word by heart.

"I will not seek to deny," he writes, "that I was spurred on not only by my love for art, but by a softer sentiment—by my resolution not to be unworthy of the affectionate encouragement bestowed upon me by Ristori, for whom I burned with enthusiasm. But when we came to Rome, in the spring, I perceived that her generous and confidential encouragement was intended not for the young man, but solely for the young artist! I did not prize it the less for that, and I continued to love her as a friend, and to admire her as an artiste. I was seventeen, and my disillusion did not wound my heart, but enriched my store of experience. . . . All the gifts and virtues which adorned her as a woman and as an actress united to influence me to be worthy of her companionship."

An instance of the thoroughness with which Ristori studied a new part is to be found in her Marie Antoinette, of which not a few Americans have such affectionate

Too Much Politics

memories. That she might derive the necessary vivid impression of the sufferings of the unfortunate Queen she visited the scenes which were intimately associated with the last days of the poor Austrian. When she played Marie Antoinette at Bologna, in November of 1868, after returning from her second excursion to the United States, the occasion threatened to take on a political significance of which Ristori, or Paolo Giacometti, the author of the drama, had never dreamed. The town authorities, fearing that the play might contain dangerous theories of democracy, at first refused their consent to its production, and it was only by the use of much influence, and the assertion that she had no desire to pose as a politician, that Ristori could have the ban removed. There is, as we all know, nothing in *Marie Antoinette* which is likely to upset either kingdoms or republics, for it but pictures the troubles of a lovely Queen, a stupid monarch, and an unhappy family who found royalty rather a dreary employment.

However, the timorous officials of Bologna sent a force of cavalry to guard the entrances to the theatre on the first night of *Marie Antoinette*. The house was crowded, and Giacometti, the distracted author, hovered dismally in the wings as he feared that

his precious drama might be hissed from the stage. For the Radicals of the town were assembled in front, under the impression that the story would prove a justification of the French Revolution — and the author knew that he had provided no such justification. The play began, and proceeded fairly well until the third act, when the Radicals became violently displeased at the amount of sympathy which the Royal Family monopolised. The very sorrows of Marie Antoinette seemed an eloquent arraignment of the cruel leaders of the Revolution. So great were the murmurs of the Radicals that the majority of the audience, who were enraptured by the superb acting of Ristori, now found it hard to hear anything that was being said upon the stage. Ristori grew indignant. Moving to the wings, she asked Giacometti to address the malcontents. He, poor fellow, dared not. Then she advanced to the footlights, and resolutely told the Radicals that they had caused much inconvenience to those of their neighbours who had come to the theatre to be amused. To judge of the play, she said, one must listen to it without political bias. A storm of applause greeted this speech. The Radicals mended their manners, and at the fall of the curtain Ristori was enthusiastically recalled,

A Great Portrait

as she came out hand in hand with the trembling Giacometti. No one objected to the play after that episode. "There is Marie Antoinette!" cried the women on the street, as Ristori walked past them.

In Marie Antoinette Ristori accomplished the same feat that she did in Mary Stuart. She so gilded the character that one felt irresistibly drawn towards it, and never stopped to ask—not, at least, until the play was over — whether this was the Antoinette of history. Probably hers was not so much the Antoinette of history as the Queen of Giacometti, but we saw before us a doomed woman, brave in her misfortunes, regal, almost sublime, and we became for the nonce her slavish admirers. Thus it was with Mary Stuart, whom Ristori depicted in almost saint-like guise. But it was not a saintliness of the mawkish kind. Mary Stuart was always a real woman, and never more so than in the famous interview with Elizabeth where, losing all control over herself as the English Queen insults the helpless captive, she cries:

"But woe to you! when in the years to come
The world shall rend from you the robe of honour,
With which your arch-hypocrisy hath veiled
The secret-raging flames of lawless lust."

Mary Stuart

The sudden fury of the outraged Queen of Scots shone like lightning flashes from the indignant heavens. It seemed strange that Elizabeth did not shrink into nothingness, or fall dead upon the stage, as this mighty storm burst above her head.

Ristori was but eighteen years old when she first essayed Mary Stuart. After the performance, which had been rewarded by pronounced applause from an Italian audience, she asked Mascherpa, her manager, what he thought of it. Mascherpa shrugged his shoulders, and looked pityingly at the girl, as he told her that she had undoubted talent for comedy — "but, as for tragedy, it is not for you, and I advise you to abandon it entirely!" Ristori was bitterly disappointed at this criticism, yet she had the sense to see that her Mary Stuart was immature. As she gave the character in after years it was, of course, a far greater achievement.

Perhaps, from a purely artistic standpoint, Ristori's Queen Elizabeth, in Giacometti's feeble play of that name, was her most finished personation. The other characters in the drama were mere puppets, but Elizabeth stood out as an embodiment of haughty power, ability, hypocrisy, cruelty, and feminine weakness. In history the Queen was a complex figure, and Ristori, while she

The Virgin Queen

hardly followed history closely, and made the worst of her heroine, played her in an equally complex fashion. It seemed as if all the infinite experience and resources of the actress were exhibited in portraying the curious inconsistencies of this woman. To see her was to obtain a lesson in acting from which the best of Thespians might gain knowledge. The performance was full of contrasts, yet always harmonious, powerful, even thrilling. Fear, jealousy, craftiness, the delirium of ambition,—the signing of the death-warrant of Mary Stuart, the quarrel with Lord Essex, the marvellous death scene — left impressions, as of studies by Rembrandt, never to be effaced. Viewed as a whole, without attempt at analysis, the characterisation was one of theatric grandeur; viewed in detail, as we would examine the pieces of some splendid mosaic, it was no less remarkable in the accuracy of its byplay, gesture, look, and action. The death scene, wherein Elizabeth stretched forth her hands as she fancied that Essex stood before her, was the very climax of tragedy.

In the spring of 1874 Ristori, with her husband and children, started out upon a remarkable journey around the world. It included visits to Brazil and other South

Around the World

American countries, to Mexico, the United States, the Sandwich Islands, New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon, and Egypt. After a most successful jaunt this indefatigable woman reached Italy once more in January of 1876, having travelled some 35,283 miles upon the water and 8,365 on land. She had given 212 performances. Soon she was playing once more in different cities on the Continent. At last, in 1880, Ristori declared that she must retire. But she was not yet of the retiring temperament. Instead of giving up the stage she began to study English, with a view of playing the entire part of Lady Macbeth in the language of Shakespeare. She had, some time before, given the sleep-walking scene from *Macbeth* with the English words, and had satisfied a London audience by the attempt. But now she had a more difficult task before her, and she went about it with her usual energy. She asks, in her reminiscences, whether Demosthenes, with his pebbles in his mouth, was more industrious than she was. A facility for English did not come easily to her Latin tongue or throat, but she acquired it, and ventured to play Lady Macbeth at Drury Lane Theatre, in the summer of 1882. The experiment appears to have been crowned with praise. Ristori then

Something Wanting

played Elizabeth in the same language. Yet it cannot be said that she gained anything, in an artistic way, by learning English, well as she acquitted herself. A certain smoothness and sonority of voice which distinguished her use of the soft Italian vowels was absent when she recited in alien lines.

When Ristori made her farewell appearances in this country, during the season of 1884–85, a New York critic said of her venture into the domain of English, in his critique of her Elizabeth:

"In garb, in feature, and in every gesture, she seems in this play to be Britain's Virgin Queen returned to life. Not in voice, however, for now that she uses the English language instead of her melodious native tongue it must be confessed that, although she exhibits a very creditable command over its rugged consonants, she has a pronounced inflection, and it is extremely difficult to follow her through a long speech, especially when excitement causes her to speak quickly. This defect, and it must be bluntly called a defect, makes Ristori's Elizabeth a less perfect impersonation than it was when the actress drew admiring crowds to the old French Theatre nearly twenty years ago. So that it is not only the work of Time the lady has to fight against. In truth, she is remarkably well preserved, and retains her strength of voice

and gracefulness of manner to an unexpected degree. But it is always evident that she speaks a language with which, although she has learned it better than many educated persons ever learn a foreign tongue, she still lacks sympathy and a complete mastery of its subtleties."

Final Work

It was during this final American engagement that Ristori played Lady Macbeth to the Macbeth of Edwin Booth, whom she termed the " Talma of the United States." She also appeared as Mary Stuart, acting in English, with the German company of the Thalia Theatre in New York. The latter experiment suggested the linguistic feat of Tommaso Salvini, who used to act in Italian while his American company replied to him in English.

In later years Ristori has lived abroad in an honourable retirement, made happy by a host of noble memories. Her residence is now in Rome.

The career of this player is welcome evidence that the art of acting did not perish with the so-called " palmy days." It is very easy to talk of the degeneracy of the stage, but the prospects of the drama were never brighter than they are to-day — and that is true in spite of the incidental manifestations of morbidness, in the shape of

The Dramatic Future

"problem" plays and erotic literature. The theatre is now a far-reaching institution with many ramifications and not a few excrescences, and it caters to thousands more of people than it did in the olden time. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should likewise cater to a variety of tastes, and that a certain class of spectators should insist upon performances either flimsy, meretricious, or worse. But it is not fair to judge the theatre at large by inane extravaganzas or degenerate plays. We might as well judge of wine by its dregs, or condemn the law because of a goodly number of rascally attorneys. The chances for study may not be as great as they were in the days when actors travelled less and played more parts in a week, frequently, than they do now in a season, yet there is more sober attention paid to the drama than ever before, and there is as much regard to artistic possibilities as was to be found a hundred years ago. We may have a dearth of great actors, but there are many talented, conscientious artists who dignify their profession and contribute their full quota to the "public stock of harmless pleasure." Let us not be pessimistic, so far as America is concerned. The outlook is promising, not dreary, and the day seems not far distant

The Dramatic Future

when the drama will have its highest encouragement in this country. There is no longer a sting in the sneering question of Sydney Smith: "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book, or goes to an American play, or looks at an American picture or statue?" The American playwright and the American player are already powers in the world of art.



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